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PlayStation® Magazine - Australia

ISSUE 55 MAY 2011
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Can this raging bull change sports games forever?

VERDICT! ▶

SHIFT 2

Gran Turismo just got a high-octane wake-up call

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON

L.A. NOIRE

Why this Australian-made blockbuster should be #1 on your most-wanted list!

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW • NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN SCREENS

SAINTS ROW: THE THIRD

Wrong game, wrong time?

DiRT 3

The king of off-road is back with a vengeance

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2011's hottest
first-person shooters

BATTLEFIELD 3, BRINK,
OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER,
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION,
PORTAL 2, BODYCOUNT, CRYYSIS 2,
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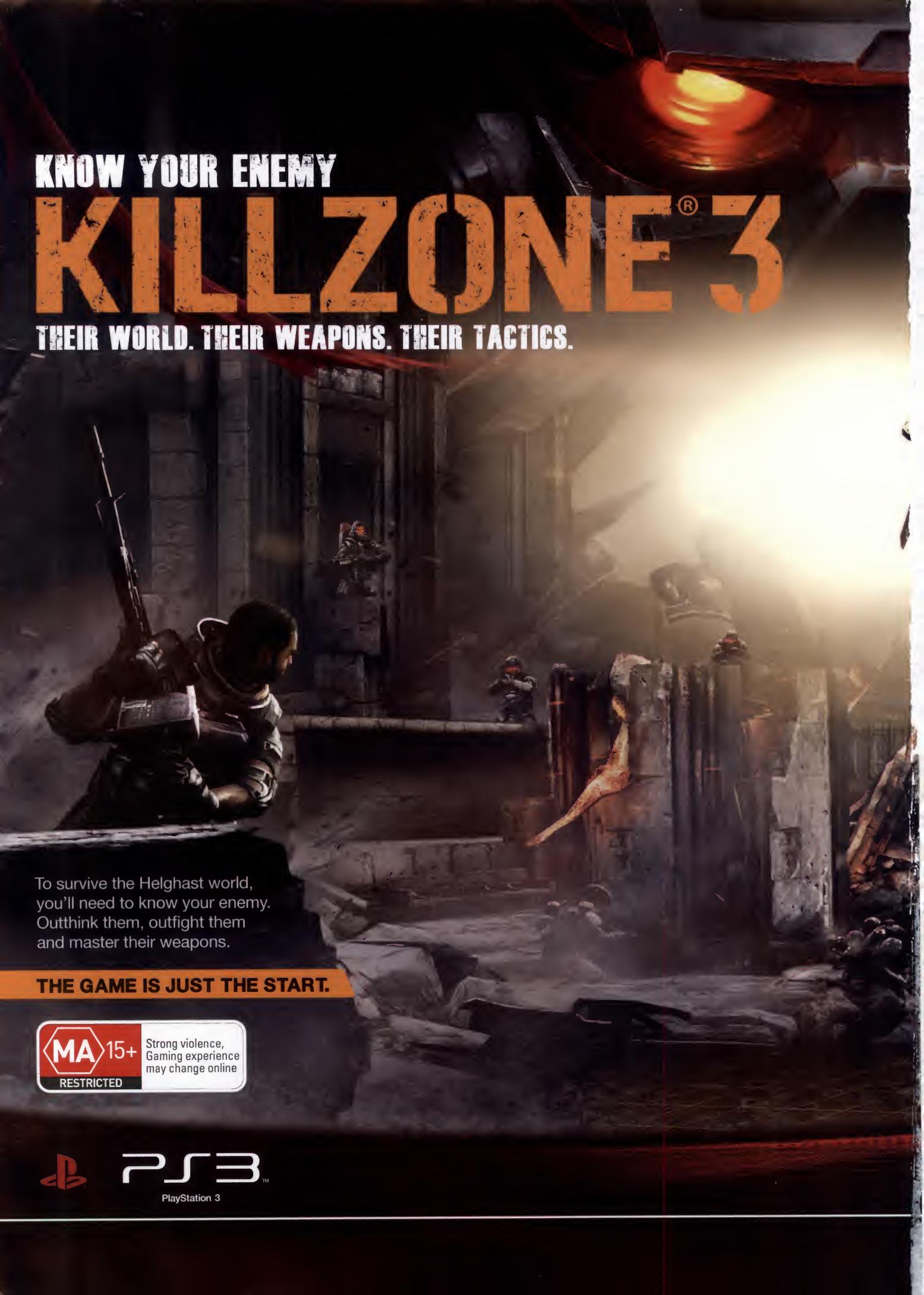


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ROCKSTAR VP OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
JERONIMO BARRERA

► COVER STORY

L.A. NOIRE

A hunch worth following

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Brink

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Meet the team

Paul Taylor**Deputy Editor**

Just discovered a ton of new but old songs in Music Unlimited and am sapping the broadband in the office.

Playing: 3rd Birthday

Wanting: Deus Ex: HR

**Stephanie Goh****Art Director**

I've been to a few food and wine events and taken a few photos. They seem to get blurry as the nights go on.

Playing: Bulletstorm

Wanting: Brink

**Adam Mathew****Associate Editor**

Divided my time between painting walls in *de Blob* 2 and spraying Hawke with enemy lifeblood in *DA II*.

Playing: Homefront

Wanting: Mass Effect 3

**James Cottée****Contributor**

No matter how much I hit F5, the web won't tell me when we're getting the new Monster Hunter.

Playing: Bulletstorm

Wanting: Arkham City

**James Ellis****Contributor**

Spewing Sheenisms. Bi-winning ways, a bungalow of goddesses, and a garage full of mercury surfboards.

Playing: Crysis 2

Wanting: Deus Ex: HR

**Nathan Lawrence****Contributor**

Abusing the potency of sparking a group slow clap that ultimately leads to nothing amazing.

Playing: Crysis 2

Wanting: Portal 2

**Dave Kozicki****Contributor**

Killzone 3 players: please learn to play classes other than Marksman or Infiltrator and follow objectives. Thanks.

Playing: Killzone 3

Wanting: L.A. Noire

**Toby McCasker****Contributor**

The girlfriend just discovered how to turn on the PS3. So far she's finished *Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon*, and *LittleBigPlanet*.

Playing: Nothing!

Wanting: Something!

**Angry Sackboy****Contributor**

Has been absorbed your rage about *Mortal Kombat* being banned and the lack of an R18+ rating. Fury rising.

Playing: LBP2

Wanting: Mortal Kombat



Editorial



Using cut-scenes in a videogame is lazy and should be completely avoided, says THQ core games chief Danny Bilson.

"Doing a cinematic is the failure state, that is the last resort of game storytelling," he insisted during an interview with *Edge*.

Bilson went on to claim that he's never played a videogame that has featured a satisfying narrative.

"I can't think of one. That's a place we have not cracked yet, as an industry. We should be able to tell great stories, fresh original stories, in this industry, just like in books, movies or anything else."

I completely disagree with him. I also wonder how long it'll take the staff Kaos, developers of the THQ's narrative-driven *Homefront*, to recover from this slap in the face. I'd also question Bilson's actual commitment to original stories. *Homefront* may be considerably less generic than the last few years worth of shooters but don't try to argue that John Milius really isn't just cribbing from himself with *Red Dawn*.

Don't give me some cop-out rubbish that *Homefront*'s narrative sequences aren't cutscenes simply because they remain in first-person, either. If you're delivering key narrative details to a player, during which time they're taking a break from normal gameplay, it's a cutscene. Being rooted in one spot with the ability to look around a little is still a cutscene – it's just slightly more interactive.

I'm not really sure what Bilson is proposing. Whatever it is I suggest he do it. I'll be fascinated to see what he comes up with to make me care about what's going on without a cutscene or two. Yes, gameplay is ALWAYS paramount – but without some kind of story you're left with eight-to-12 hours of mindless activity. Games like *Tetris* might be the modern-day equivalent of ball-in-a-cup, but not all games are *Tetris*. Bilson would do well not to assume the entire gaming community suffers from paralysing ADHD. Not all of us get the shakes if we're not constantly mashing buttons and frenziedly clicking on something, Bilson.

Taking a look at Metacritic, for instance, at some of this generation's best-reviewed and best-selling games yields titles like *GTAIV*, *Uncharted 2*, *Red Dead Redemption*, *Mass Effect 2* and more. All of these games feature cutscenes throughout the game. The reason they're regarded so highly is because they merge excellent gameplay with compelling stories.

Coming from a former Hollywood screenwriter I would've expected a better appreciation of that.

Luke Reilly**Editor**

Playing: Homefront
Wanting: L.A. Noire

SPEAK WITH US!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games – on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins the Game of the Month! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:



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Billion Dollar Baby

The life and death of *Guitar Hero*

Guitar Hero is the highest profile casualty of this generation. One question remains: where did it all go wrong?

Only three years ago *Guitar Hero* shot past the \$1 billion revenue mark – in the US alone. To date it has shipped more than 25 million units for roughly \$2 billion return on investment. *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock* made \$1 billion on its own. To put this in perspective Activision purchased the franchise in 2006 for a measly \$100 million.

So what killed it?

Once the formula has been set it became relatively easy to prepare version after version of *Guitar Hero*. The stage was set for as many *Guitar Hero* titles as Activision had the manpower to produce, and it's exactly what happened. In 2009 Activision released five separate SKUs of *Guitar Hero* and the brand lost most of its relevance largely thanks to this over-exposure.

With sales down the margins shrank and vanished. The franchise couldn't support so much high-cost licensing, significant manufacturing costs and the

amount of staff (as many as 500 people were reportedly retrenched worldwide following the closure of the *Guitar Hero* business) if it wasn't selling like it used to. Unfortunately, it wasn't. *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock* failed to move units.

It also felt like the series was running short on classic tracks that a) hadn't already used in a past title and b) hadn't already appeared as part of *Rock Band's* 2000+ song DLC library. It's telling, perhaps, that *Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock's* ace-in-the-hole was Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' – a piano-driven track. While playing piano notes on a plastic guitar it felt like the series had nothing left to give.

Some analysts are tipping a brief comeback in a few years time but, for now, the amps are off. It was a victim of its own success.





Fallen Heroes: The studios behind *Guitar Hero*

The *Guitar Hero* juggernaut may have rocked itself into oblivion, but let's take a look at how it's affected the developers behind the series over the years.

Harmonix Music Systems

In 2005, Harmonix partnered with RedOctane to release the peripheral-based music game, *Guitar Hero*. The rest is history. After it became a phenomenon Activision acquired RedOctane leaving Harmonix to be snapped up by Viacom. Viacom went on to create the *Rock Band* series, which was published by MTV Games and distributed by EA Partners. Recently Viacom sold Harmonix to investment firm Columbus Nova and MTV Games has been shuttered.

Community manager at Harmonix, John Drake said: "We were sad to hear... that Activision was discontinuing development on *Guitar Hero*. Our thoughts are with those who are losing their jobs, and we wish them the best of luck."

"The discontinuation of *Guitar Hero* is discouraging news for fans of the band game genre," he added. "It's been a wild battle of the bands since 2007, but we respect and appreciate all of the hard work and innovation of our peers who have shared the music gaming space with us, and we look forward to rocking in the future."

The *Rock Band* series remains in action and new DLC continues to arrive on a weekly basis.

RedOctane

Before *Guitar Hero* arrived RedOctane manufactured unlicensed peripherals including dance pads and arcade sticks. With the success of *Guitar Hero* RedOctane was acquired by Activision. Unfortunately RedOctane was closed down in February 2010 with only staff related to instrument development and founders Kai and Charles Huang remaining at Activision.

Neversoft

Neversoft hit the big time with the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series but following the acquisition of RedOctane (but not Harmonix) Activision needed a developer for the franchise. Neversoft was pegged for the role and went on to develop nine games in the series. After suffering layoffs in early 2010, Neversoft remains at Activision, though with no *Tony Hawk's* or *Guitar Hero* games to develop its current activity is unknown. A job listing from last year suggested that the studio was working on an "action shooter." With the mega-success of *Red Dead Redemption* the money's on it being a sequel to *GUN*.

Beenox

Beenox worked primarily on ports before being acquired by Activision in 2005. Beenox developed just one *Guitar Hero* game for Activision, *Guitar Hero: Greatest Hits*, which was a collection of songs from *Guitar Hero*, *GHII* and *GHIII* tracks redone for a full band setup. Beenox should survive the fallout without too much hassle; Activision announced earlier this year that that Beenox would be in charge of the *Spider-Man* franchise for the time being.

Vicarious Visions

Vicarious Visions has spent most of its times porting games from the *Tony Hawk's* and *Spider-Man* series to other platforms, in addition to developing *Spider-Man 2: Enter Electro* for PlayStation and several licensed portable games. It was acquired by Activision in 2005 and brought onto the *Guitar Hero* franchise in 2007 focusing on Wii ports and the DS. Vicarious Visions reportedly lost about 50 employees to layoffs as a result of the *Guitar Hero* business shutdown.

Budcat Creations

Iowa-based Budcat worked in partnership with Majesco Entertainment, EA and Activision on multiple titles between 2000 and 2008. After working on the PS2 version of *Guitar Hero: Aerosmith* Budcat was purchased by Activision in November 2008 and was tasked with porting *Guitar Hero* games to PS2. Nearly two years to the day later, in November 2010, Activision shut down Budcat.

Underground Development

Originally known as Z-Axis, the studio behind the *Dave Mirra BMX* series and *Thrasher: Skate and Destroy* was scooped up by Activision in 2002. Z-Axis spent the following years doing grunt work rather than developing any further extreme sports titles. Its name was changed in early 2008 and they were moved from Foster City, California to Redwood Shores, California. Underground Development developed *Guitar Hero: Van Halen*, a game sold for \$80 in Australia but given away for free to purchasers of *GH5* in the US. Activision eventually closed down the studio for good in February 2010.

FreeStyleGames

UK outfit FreeStyleGames, the studio behind *DJ Hero*, was purchased by Activision in September 2008. It's reportedly been hit with layoffs since the news and their future is unclear. Hopefully they don't go the way of Bizarre Creations – another English studio purchased by Activision in September 2007 and shut down for keeps earlier this year.

7 Studios

7 Studios had signed on to develop a turntable-based music game, *Scratch: The Ultimate DJ*, for Genius Products and Numark. Activision bought 7 Studios in 2009, which started a legal skirmish in which Genius accused Activision of conspiring to delay the completion of *Scratch* in order to benefit *DJ Hero*. Unfortunately for 7 Studios Activision shut them down in February this year with the rest of the *Guitar Hero* business.

- ▶ The main villainess in *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* has been revealed. Little is known about Katherine Marlowe, though the US PlayStation blog reveals she's the head of a 400-year-old secret society and she's got a girl boner for Nathan's prized-ring (Sir Francis Drake's ring; the one he wears on a length of cord around his neck).
- ▶ Activision is allegedly working on *Dance Hero*. Kotaku is reporting that artists like Timbaland, Jay Sean, The Prodigy and Afrojack will be featured in the unannounced title. Activision trademarked the name *Dance Hero* way back in 2008.
- ▶ Sony has informed staff at London Studio, Studio Liverpool and Evolution Studios that several of their projects will be "streamlined or closed" to focus development on higher-priority first party offerings.
- ▶ *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* hits Australia on August 25, 2011.
- ▶ A new *Tomb Raider* movie is being prepared for a 2013 release.
- ▶ The next *Resident Evil* movie will be in theatres – In 3D, naturally – in September 2012.
- ▶ *Homefront* racked up more pre-orders than any other game in the THQ's history, however the company's stock dropped 26 per cent upon poor early review scores hitting the web.
- ▶ Bungie's first project with Activision is rumoured to be an MMO shooter called *Destiny*.
- ▶ *Resistance 3* will feature just 16-player multiplayer – down from *Resistance 2*'s 60 players. Insomniac says the move is about making the competitive experience more personal.
- ▶ *Dead Rising 2* developer Capcom Vancouver (formerly Blue Castle Games) has two projects currently underway.
- ▶ Through to the end of 2010 Sony has sold 47.9 million PS3 consoles. More than 80 per cent of consoles are connected to the internet and there are 70 million PSN accounts.
- ▶ God of War and Twisted Metal creator David Jaffe thinks that console makers should cap the number of bug-fix patches publishers can release for their games. "Hardware manufacturers, I feel, should only allow one to four updates to the software per game per year," he said, triggering a massive round of applause at GDC. "None of them should come within the first one to two months the game is shipping," he added.
- ▶ Hollywood seems keen to have another crack at a *Doom* movie. The new film would apparently be a reboot, ignoring the first effort of just five years ago.
- ▶ *Batman: Arkham Asylum* has a release date: October 19.
- ▶ NGP game budgets are reportedly two-to-three times that of the PSP.
- ▶ DICE boss Karl Magnus-Trodesson says the Swedish developer's rivals are "getting lazy."
- ▶ EA Sports reports that *NBA Jam* for PS3 won't have additional roster updates.
- ▶ Quantic Dream boss David Cage has revealed that at least 72 per cent of players finished *Heavy Rain*.

► IN REALITY

Respawning is quite difficult

As seen in: pretty much every game, ever

One of the more cooler facets of videogames is the concept of unlimited lives. In a move very unlike realism, game designers have been giving us a handful of second chances to cock things up again, and again, and again.

At the risk of doing your thinking for you; we reckon this feat is fairly impossible in real-life. And we say 'fairly' impossible, because Jesus Christ (apparently) has been well documented busting out a cheeky respawn. Granted, we hear he had to deal with some horrendous three day lag to get back into the game. But hey; still pretty impressive.

There have, of course, been videogames that make you treasure your virtual life in a vain effort to achieve parity with reality. Who among us can forget the tense 'one-hit-and-you're-dead' antics of *Bushido Blade*? It was life on a knife's edge, to be sure. But you were only ever one 'retry' button away from rebirth.

In 2003 Capcom decided to take the concept of mortality further in *Steel Battalion*, a mech sim that came bundled with a dedicated controller bigger than Darth Vader's torso and covered in more buttons.

First, Capcom captured the mundane nature of life by forcing you to run through lengthy start-up routines before every mission by systematically flicking through a series of switches and dedicated ignition buttons.

When it came to carking it, the game was merciless. If you did not eject when prompted, there would be an explosion and all of your saved data got deleted.

But once again, that



A textbook example of a bad respawn

► Continue?

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sadistic game design could be circumvented by simply starting the game again. Not so in real-life, when dementia wipes your memory you can't just quit to the title screen in the game of life and start anew.

So how does one respawn in reality? If we were to follow videogame logic, reincarnation might be the best way to respawn. If you're not familiar with it, reincarnation is believed to occur when the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, comes back to life in a newborn body. It's a doctrine that is a central tenet within quite a few of the major religions, not to mention a few of the kooky splinter ones as well.

Sounds like a pretty sweet deal in theory. But if we were once again to apply gaming logic to it, the whole concept becomes flawed. First off, unlike most games that come with instructions, whoever designed actual life forgot to package

in the instruction booklet. As such, the process of triggering or even *earning* said respawn is a bloody mystery. Don't bother looking on GameFAQs for a few spoilers either. That crap just isn't there.

If you're not keen on buying the millenia old hintbooks and playguides offered by organised religion, you can turn to science.

Defibrillators aren't as expensive as you might imagine (see boxout) and as long as you don't get into too much trouble and keep someone around to operate it (and yell "clear") you could earn quite a few lives that way.

Admittedly this is still pretty stop-gap. Cells always degrade over time and other medical issues (read: glitches) can ruin your run too.

The only option left is cloning; copying the game of life itself. Sounds like cheapskate piracy to us. We're not gonna help you do it.

► NUMBER CRUNCHING

13.7 million

▲ The staggering number of *Call of Duty: Black Ops* units sold in the US alone.

2

▲ The number of 'refused classification' fatalities *Mortal Kombat* received from our censors. Props to Warner Bros. for testing their might.

Separated at Birth!

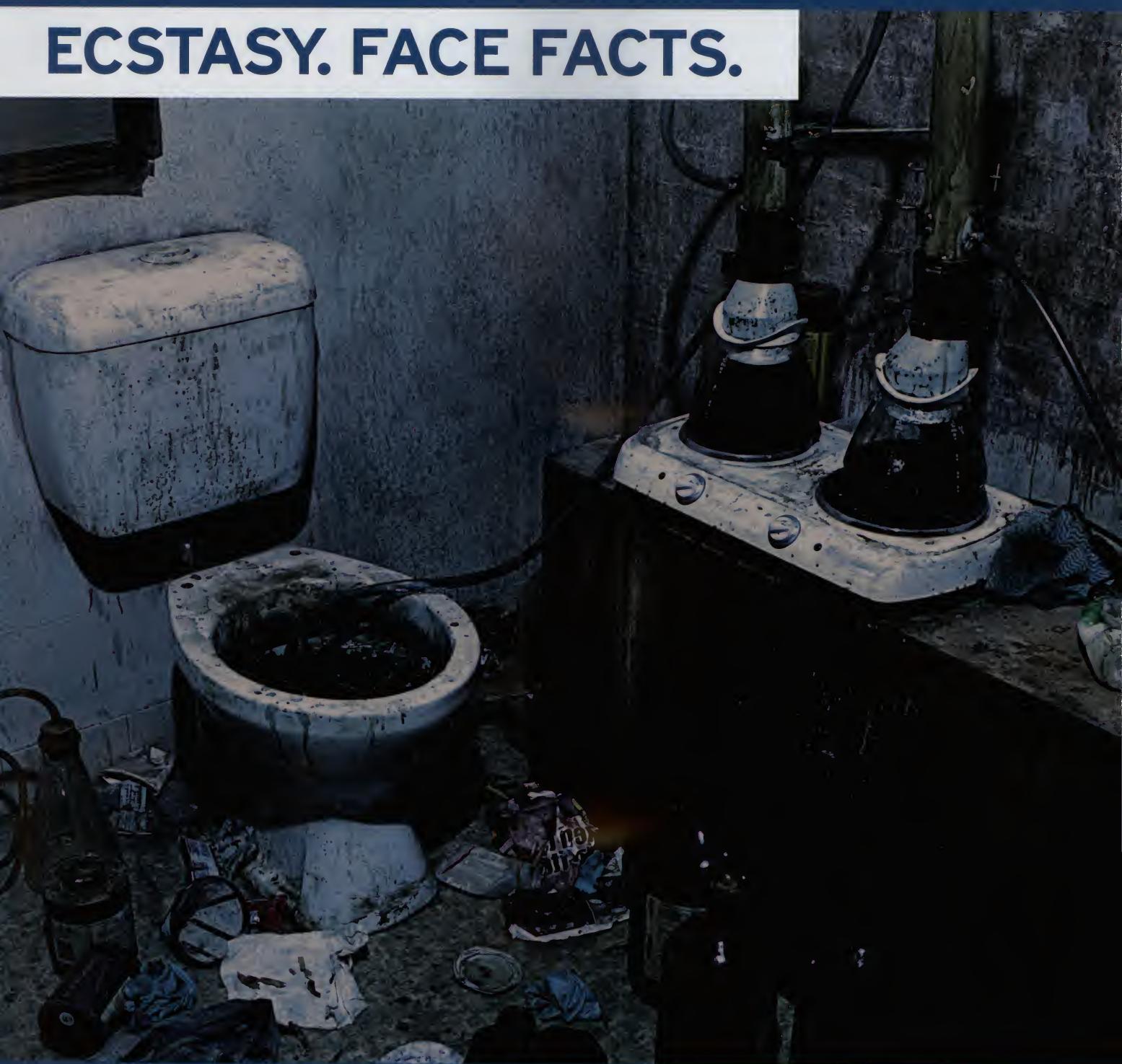
NO. 25 Varric Thethras, shake hands with Ray Winstone, the guy most people flat out assume you were modelled after.



For those of you who haven't dived into *Dragon Age II* yet, Varric is a dwarven rogue who narrates part of the story and is encountered fairly early on. Likewise, Ray Winstone is a typecast as a tough guy character with a similarly bad-arse voice and demeanour. While playing *Dragon Age II* in the office it was amazing (read: eventually annoying) how many non-gaming workmates sidled up, saw Varric on the equip screen and said, "Hey! It's Ray Winstone!"

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SO YOU WANT TO BE A ... SPY?

OPTION 1

It sounds like a cool job, going undercover and imagining yourself playing with cool gadgets, having fistfights with villains and shagging posse of women whose fathers clearly had no say in their names. Pack up your fantasies. The jobs that fit the most accurately into the criteria of being a spy in the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) are either Surveillance Officers or Intelligence Professional.

The former can be a tedious job broken up with moments of adrenaline-fuelled action, as you're part of a team that provides evidence to other faculties within ASIO. On the ground you'll be watching people, as you follow them around town, on foot, on public transport or even from your car. You probably won't get to drive an Aston Martin, but you will learn some cool advanced driving techniques. Your gadgets (read: surveillance equipment) will be cutting edge but they won't be pens that are actually dart guns.

You also need to be able to pack up your life and go interstate on a moment's notice, be prepared to work shifts (including weekends) and adapt to a life that is without regular patterns. While ASIO don't mention it explicitly, it would probably help if you were inconspicuous with a face that could easily blend into a crowd.

Intelligence Professionals are split into two sub categories: Intelligence Analyst and Collection Officer. The former needs a kind of *Beautiful Mind* level of problem-solving genius (minus the madness), while the latter has you collecting info both overtly and covertly via telecommunications and also by liaising with members of the public. Both roles need you to interact with people from backgrounds not of your own and be prepared to sacrifice part of your own life for the greater good. Being able to adapt to change is also a requirement.

No matter what role you're applying for you need to be willing to have every facet of your life picked and poked at when you go through the interview, including very personal elements such as sexual practices and preferences. If they don't already know you like weird porn, they will find out. You may also need to go to Canberra for training.

TIME:

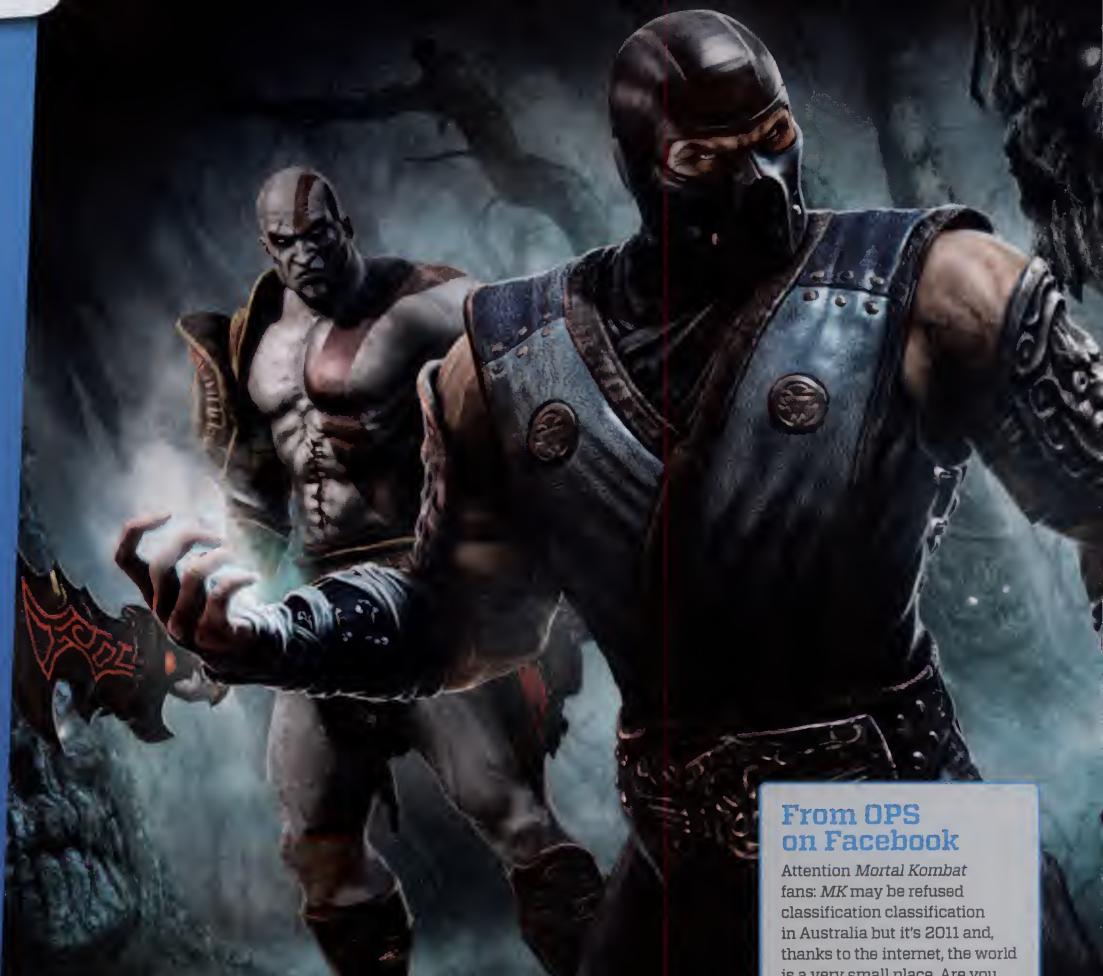
Surveillance officers have up to eight months of training, including three months of Recruit Training in various locations, two weeks of defensive driving and other activities with fellow ASIO officers and 12 weeks of surveillance training. Intelligence Professionals have a year-long training and probation period with six months in Canberra, however you'll do a lot of travel within the year.

OPTION 2

Turn on *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*

TIME:

90 seconds



► NEWS

Thwarted Kombat

Mortal Kombat refused classification

The Classification Board has decided the upcoming *Mortal Kombat* – the ninth game in the long-running series – cannot be contained within the MA15+ classification and has refused it classification. *Mortal Kombat* is effectively banned.

The Board objected to the "explicit depictions of dismemberment, decapitation, disembowelment and other brutal forms of slaughter".

"We are extremely disappointed that *Mortal Kombat*, one of the world's oldest and most successful video game franchises, will not be available to mature Australian gamers," Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment said in a statement.

"WBIE would not market mature content where it is not appropriate for the audience. We understand that not all content is for every audience, but there is an audience for mature gaming content and it would make more sense to have the R18+ classification in Australia."

WBIE Australia appealed to the Classification Review Board over the

Mortal Kombat decision. The Classification Review Board is a separate panel; you may recall Sega's *Aliens vs Predator* had its RC decision overturned in early 2010 and the game was released tagged MA15+.

WBIE refused to budge and submit a modified version of the game, arguing "that wouldn't be *Mortal Kombat*."

"After reviewing both the game play and the Board's original decision WBIE Australia believe the violence in the game is on par with numerous other titles readily available for sale in the Australian market," the company said.

"As such the company wants to exhaust all options to make the game available to *Mortal Kombat* fans in this country. An identical version of the game will be submitted for appeal."

Unfortunately the appeal was ignored and the RC rating has been upheld. *Mortal Kombat* will now simply find its way into the country via online purchases from overseas retailers. As an RC game it will be a "prohibited import" but our Customs source still claims you would be very unlucky to have it inspected and seized at the border.

From OPS on Facebook

Attention *Mortal Kombat* fans: MK may be refused classification in Australia but it's 2011 and, thanks to the internet, the world is a very small place. Are you now less likely to buy it or more likely to buy it?

Tiny Tim Less likely. Don't have a credit card, but if I could walk down the shops and buy it I would.

Alex Saward Most likely getting it.

Al Peck Still going to buy it, but now I can get the bookends.

Tristram Xod Ewings Damn straight I'm getting it. Been hanging for this since I first saw it and it being banned just makes me want it more.

Simon Wallace Still getting it. The internet is a wonderful thing.

Michael Kennedy Was always going to, however now Australian retailers lose my money.

Matt Williams If anything it makes me more curious. Now if only the system wasn't region coded so we couldn't just order it elsewhere... oh wait, it ISN'T? Well, shoot me down - I guess the RC effectively means nothing, doesn't it? All it does is drive all that business overseas instead of going through Australian retailers.

Tony Barton Always preferred MK over SF, and will buy it anyway.

Brad Wall More than likely I will buy it. Was going to, but now I'm curious to see why it would be banned.



► INFOCUS

DEAD ISLAND

Yeah, we know. Zombie games have been done to death. But they really haven't been attempted like *this* before.

Dead Island will feature open-world gameplay, played from a first person perspective, with up to four-player co-operative play. Set in a fictional Papua New Guinean resort, this nightmare will focus on bludgeoning rather than bullets.

With customisable weaponry and RPG elements (the genre, not the weapon) *Dead Island* will reward shrewd players with XP and skills. Crap players can expect to become a holiday buffet for living-impaired jerks in Hawaiian shirts.

There is also a stamina bar, meaning that after a set amount of action with a weapon, you'll need a time-out to stop and regain your breath before continuing to attack.

This might be harder than it sounds as it has been confirmed that there are "special zombies" stalking you. That's the bad news. The good news is that the four playable characters (a rapper, a surfer, a resort employee and a local) are immune to zombie infection. They are not however immune to having their intestines pulled out.

After watching the superb *Dead Island* trailer we're hungry to sink our teeth into this.

► TOP TEN

Types of Easter Eggs to hunt down

You've finished the game and now you're bored stupid. If you're lucky enough to have another game lined up: sweet, go do that! Otherwise, it's time to milk the crap out of what you've got by scoping around for hidden easter eggs. Here are the best type of eggs waiting to be found.



1 The Literal GTA: Vice City

Those cheeky lads at Rockstar have a long history of sending up our gaming habits; in particular, the lengths that some completionists go to in order to see everything. Players who wall-tested every surface in Vice City (like sad, determined bumper cars) eventually found their way into an unmarked room. Their reward for hunting out an easter egg? An egg saying Happy Easter. Piss: taken.



2 The Fan Service

Metal Gear Solid

Hint to a gamer that there's a slight chance for some secret underpants action and they'll jump through rings to witness badly pixelated panties. MGS offered various eggs to see Meryl's under-brittches. Sure, it wasn't worth it. But we'd do it all over again.



3 The Game Within A Game

Call of Duty: Black Ops

Hey dawg, we heard you like games. So we hid a game in your game, so you can game while you game. Forget the fact that Zork is crap. The next time we slap down 120 clams for a game we want it to be like a set of Russian babushka dolls.



4 The Gracious Head Nod

Heavenly Sword

Not all game designers look over the fence and sneer at their competition. The lovely folks at Ninja Theory may have been making a rival brawler, but that didn't stop them from hiding Kratos' armour and blades in an in-game armoury. Respect earns respect.



5 The Left-Field Guest Star

NBA Jam

Getting to control a familiar face in a ludicrous context is what makes videogames great. The original *NBA Jam* had some rad easter egg players, but the remake lets you bust out a full team of Republicans and Democrats. Get some net, go nailin' with Palin.



6 The OCD Reward

Resident Evil 2

Some juice ain't worth the squeeze. Check Wesker's desk in the S.T.A.R.S. office and it will appear empty. Try it 50 times – and really, why the hell would you? – and a photo of S.T.A.R.S. team member Rebecca Chambers (clothed) will appear. Yeah. Woo.



7 The Backfire

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Some developers can get way too crafty with their egg laying. Case in point: the hidden plans for Arkham City which screamed sequel. When you have to call a game's website and leak your egg location (because nobody has found it six months on) it's a good 'un.



8 The Ego Stroker

MGS: Peace Walker

For some designers it isn't enough to have their name burned into your eyes during the opening scenes and closing credits. No, they must hide themselves as an in-game character. Granted, we'd do the same thing. But that doesn't make it any less wanky.



9 The Hidden Track

Castlevania: SOTN

Here's an old school secret that has gone the way of the dodo (...egg). Slap a game disc in a CD player to get some bonus music and the main character of the game telling you to not – for the love of God and your speakers – play the first track.



10 The Total Recall Inducer

GTA: San Andreas

Behold, the more raunchy side of GTA easter eggin'. We're certainly not going to bag out any game for including an accessible code in its innards that allows for some sweet, sweet mini-game action. But you've got to weigh that awesomeness against a full product recall and some anti-game douchebags gaining serious ammo.

► INFOCUS

CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL

You know what? The town of Juarez, and Mexico in general, is not much of a tourist destination. In 2010, 3,075 murders took place. Juarez now has a homicide rate of 230 killings per 100,000 inhabitants. It's 6.3 in New York City, by comparison.

So when a game gets announced that takes place in Los Angeles, CA and Juarez, Mexico, it gets folks nervous. Can a video game whose main gameplay mechanic consists of shooting people in the face be able to approach this issue with the sensitivity the situation in Juarez deserves? Stranger things have happened.

What we do know for sure is that *The Cartel* is all about three-player co-op. Each of the three characters will have their own unique endings and missions, including punitive raids, witness protection, tough interrogations, undercover missions and interstate car chases.

Fans of McBain will also lap up the name of the primary antagonist: The Mendoza Cartel. We're watching this one with interest.



Is paying for game cheats a good idea?

Cheaters never prosper, particularly when it costs them so much to cheat in the first place



Paul Taylor

YES

Paul gets that sometimes you just want to mash something as powerfully as possible; the quickest way there is often the most satisfying.

This all depends on your meaning and intention of 'good'. It's definitely one of the smartest ideas games companies have come up with, and EA is becoming a grandmaster of it. So, for EA, it's definitely a good thing.

However, this boils down to the style of games companies are making, and I'm limiting this argument to offline-only – there still needs to be that divide between offline enhancements and paying for an ability that's going to improve your online game.

Games like *Need for Speed Hot Pursuit*, with a glut of shiny metal and intoxicating tracks, deserved to be thrashed and bashed. *Fight Night Champion*'s boxers are ready to be uncloaked and loosed upon virtual meat – you want to feel powerful and, dammit, you want to feel it now, not in 10 hours time. We get that, and EA understands that. When you're

contained within the game world it's your game, so make it what you want it to be.

Plus, the price point is hardly offensive. It's pretty tempting to drop a few bucks for some extra XP, or unlock the entire roster of cars and tracks in *Hot Pursuit*. Loosening your purse strings rather than jamming in a series of codes keeps your trophy count on track too, and keeps your game progressing smoothly.

Still, if you're baulking at this low cost maybe this will make a discerning gamer think about whether they really want to cheat at that game. Maybe it'll make gamers re-evaluate how much effort they put into things. Maybe it'll be a life lesson.

Plus, paying for cheats justifies the fact that, well, you're cheating – it's like paying a mini-fine in advance. There's always a cost, and this is, at least, tangible.

Want to hear more of the OPS team disagreeing with each other? Check out our Podcast available on side B of our cover disc. Want to get into a great debate with one of us, or a fellow reader? Hop onto www.facebook.com/OPSAustralia and make your case. The best topics may find their way into the magazine.

Paying for cheats is not a good idea. It's a good way to make some extra money, but it's a bad idea.

At some point in the last four years gamers lost a battle we never knew we were having.

It's bad enough so few games have cheats anymore. Back on PS2 almost every game had cheats. Now hardly any do. It's even worse that, aside from *GTA* and a token few others, the ones that do ask you to pay for them. What used to be a button code is now a microtransaction. Want to unlock and play with all this stuff on the disc you just purchased? Pony up, kid.

You can't blame Trophies for this. "But cheats would make Trophies meaningless!" some might exclaim. Deactivate Trophies if cheats are used. Problem solved.

In an environment where developers and publishers are doing everything they can to combat the pre-owned market why do so few of them embrace great, free cheats anymore? You want people to hang onto your games? Fill them with cool, funny and handy cheats to experiment with – and don't, for the love of Zeus, charge for them.

I couldn't put a figure on the extra numbers of hours I got from games on account of cheats. Playing the original *Colin McRae Rally* on hover-car mode was more entertaining than playing it normally. I used to LOVE playing *Hitman 2* in zero gravity mode. Remember that? Slain NPCs would float off into the sky. For extra yucks I used to combine it with nailgun mode.

Long live free cheats.



Luke Reilly

NO

Luke has a fantasy that would see him being able to apply cheats to the real world. Invulnerability on demand? Works for him.

She lost his LEGO, deleted his saved games and gave the dog a makeover...

PLAYTIME IS OVER.



Stay under the parental radar and annoy your kin!



Ambush your prey with a wide array of toy weaponry!



Barbie doll dissection and diary lock-picking minigames!



Around the World in PS3

OPS trawls high and low for what's going on around the globe in gaming



▲ GAMES ARE TOOLS OF THE DEVIL. AGAIN

NEW YORK, USA

EA has hailed Fox News' denouncement of *Bulletstorm* for putting a spotlight on its brand new IP. The US network published an article titled "Is *Bulletstorm* the Worst Video Game in the World?" in which one of its experts (somehow) argued it would be responsible for an increase in sex crimes due to the kill-related double entendres (like Gang Bang for multiple kills). EA Games chief Frank Gibeau proudly insisted, "We love Fox News," before admitting that the publisher is not averse to courting controversy.



▲ WANT SOME SWAG? HAVE SOME FREE DEATH

BOSTON, USA

At the time of writing it's being reported that seven attendees of the Penny Arcade Expo East have been admitted to a local hospital in Boston, and are confirmed to have contracted the bubonic plague. Yes, the same plague that swept through Europe in the 14th Century and killed an estimated 75 million people. The story doesn't state whether the seven people contracted the plague while attending PAX East, or if perhaps they showed up at the event unknowingly already with it. Sounds like an early April fools to us.



▲ BOURNE MISCARRIED

UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Confirmation of a canned Bourne game has surfaced on the personal website of Mikael Lindgren, "a freelance video game designer" whose most recent project was "*The Bourne Ascendancy* (Cancelled)". Lindgren credits himself as game director and notes the developer as Starbreeze and the publisher as EA Games. It's a shame because, based on the quality of *The Darkness*, we'd have liked to see it. Starbreeze is in fact working on a remake of Amiga classic *Syndicate*, although it hasn't officially been revealed yet.



▲ DREAMCATCHER

EDMONTON, CANADA

The results of a new survey out of Edmonton, Canada reveal that videogames may help keep nightmares away. According to an online survey of 98 military personnel, regularly playing games that involve combat help to decrease the level of "harm and aggression" dreamers feel when they are dreaming. Grant MacEwan University's Jayne Gackenbach's theory, based on this preliminary data, is that playing violent games may serve as a kind of "threat simulator" and condition the mind to cope with intense and dangerous situations in nightmares.



▲ MORE RELIEF AHoy

SENDAI, JAPAN

Sony is donating 300 million yen (\$3.6mAUD) to help the relief efforts in Japan after the 8.9 magnitude earthquake and subsequent tsunami has left the country devastated. Sony will also start a relief fund and will collect donations from employees worldwide. They will also be donating 30,000 radios to help communications between relief workers. Namco Bandai has donated 100 million yen and shut arcades in areas where power saving is needed. Sega Sammy has donated 200 million yen and Tecmo Koei has donated 10 million yen.

INTERNATIONAL TOP 10 CHARTS

EUROPE



- 1 Dragon Age II EA
- 2 Fight Night Champion EA
- 3 Killzone 3 Sony
- 4 LittleBigPlanet 2 Sony
- 5 Call of Duty: Black Ops Activision
- 6 FIFA 11 EA
- 7 Bulletstorm EA
- 8 Gran Turismo 5 Sony
- 9 Assassin's Creed Brotherhood Ubisoft
- 10 Dead Space 2 EA

JAPAN



- 1 Dissidia 012: Duodecim Final Fantasy Square Enix
- 2 Samurai Dou 4 Spike
- 3 SD Gundam G Generation World Namco Bandai
- 4 Phantasy Star 2: Infinity Sega
- 5 Monster Hunter Portable 3rd Capcom
- 6 Star Driver: Kagayaki no Takuto Namco Bandai
- 7 Makai Senki Disgaea 4 Nippon Ichi
- 8 Sengoku Musou 3Z Tecmo Koei
- 9 Catherine Atlus
- 10 Killzone 3 Sony

USA



- 1 Killzone 3 Sony
- 2 Fight Night Champion EA
- 3 Call of Duty: Black Ops Activision
- 4 NBA 2K11 2K
- 5 Red Dead Redemption Rockstar
- 6 Dead Space 2 EA
- 7 Marvel vs. Capcom 3: Fate of Two Worlds Capcom
- 8 LittleBigPlanet 2 Sony
- 9 Grand Theft Auto IV Rockstar
- 10 Gran Turismo 5 Sony

THIS MONTH

Your 30-day planner of games and the good stuff!



Mar 24

SHIFT 2 Unleashed

The latest in the *Need for Speed* franchise is out now, and it's exhausting our PS3s. You'll have a wheely good time with this, but you have to see it to believe it. Full review p72.



Apr 7

Megamind

Another animated film with kids in mind that adults will love too. When Megamind finally defeats his foe he falls into despair with no-one to challenge him. Stars Will Ferrell, Jonah Hill, Brad Pitt and Tina Fey.

Apr 10



NRL

It's Dragons versus Bulldogs at the WIN Jubilee Oval, from 3pm, in round 5 of NRL season. We'll wager a symbolic dollar on the Dragons.

AFL

Richmond and Collingwood square off at the MCG as part of round 4 in the 2011 AFL season. Bounce off at 7.40pm!

Apr 15



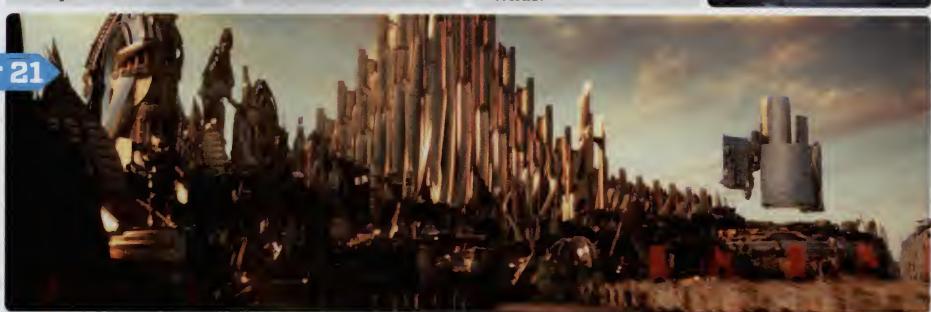
TRON: Legacy

Is it a film or an enormous visual feast? Bit of both, really, and if you have a 3D TV you'll feel particularly smug, as this will look amazing. Starring Jeff Bridges, Garrett Hedlund and Olivia Wilde.

Apr 20



Apr 21



Thor

The son of Odin, Thor, is in a more than a bit of a pickle. He's been sent down to Earth to live amongst regular people but has also re-ignited an ancient war. Now Loki, villain extraordinaire, has sent forces down dark forces from Asgard to invade Earth and wipe out the human race. Can Thor and his mighty hammer save us? We'll hazard a 'yes'. Stars Australia's own Chris Hemsworth, Natalie Portman and Anthony Hopkins.

deadmau5

Martin Solveig Skrillex
Chuckie Simon Patterson
Gabriel & Dresden Wynter Gordon

25TH MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL COMEDY FESTIVAL

30 MAR → 24 APR 2011

Apr 24

Melbourne International Comedy Festival

Today's the last day, so with any luck you'll have seen Rich Hall, Bob Franklin or Arj Barker by now. Go to www.comedyfestival.com.au for more info.

Apr 22

Creamfields

Starting in Adelaide before winding its way around the country to Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, Creamfields is an international dance festival with Deadmau5, Martin Solveig and Skrillex headlining. Check out www.creamfields.com.au for more info.



Apr 25

ANZAC Day

Remember and celebrate the ANZAC spirit, and maybe get some Two-Up in. Just please don't wear the flag around your neck. It's not a cape and you're not a superhero.

Can't miss...

Portal 2 APRIL 21

Return to Aperture Science Labs and be reunited with the (occasionally murderous) AI GLaDOS. With a whole batch of new puzzles, contraptions and gadgets to drive you insane this is shaping up to be an essential purchase.



Release Schedule

Release dates, pre-order deals, new information and much more

OUT NOW

Fight Night Champion
Genre: Sports Distributor: EA
Date: Out now

Dragon Age II
Genre: Action RPG Distributor: EA
Date: Out now

Homefront
Genre: Shooter Distributor: THQ
Date: Out now

MotorStorm Apocalypse
Genre: Racing Distributor: Sony
Date: Out now

Top Spin 4
Genre: Sport Distributor: 2K
Date: Out now

Crysis 2
Genre: Shooter Distributor: EA
Date: Out now

Yakuza 4
Genre: Action RPG Distributor: Sega
Date: Out now

SHIFT 2 Unleashed
Genre: Racing Distributor: EA
Date: Out now

WWE All Stars
Genre: Fighting Distributor: THQ
Date: Out now

Yoostar 2
Genre: Party Distributor: AIE
Date: Out now

APRIL 2011

AFL Live
Genre: Sport Distributor: HES
Date: April TBC

PlayStation Move Heroes
Genre: Adventure Distributor: Sony
Date: April TBC

Portal 2
Genre: Puzzle Distributor: EA
Date: April TBC

Rio
Genre: Party Distributor: THQ
Date: April 7

Michael Jackson The Experience
Genre: Dance Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: April 14

Sniper: Ghost Warrior
Genre: Shooter Distributor: AFA
Date: April 14


Mortal Kombat
Genre: Fighting Distributor: Warner Bros.
Date: April 19 (US)

SOCOM: Special Forces
Genre: Action Distributor: Sony
Date: April 21

► Limited Editions

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Duke Nukem Forever, the game that was never coming out, *finally will be*. Not only that, it's coming out in one of two editions.



Duke Nukem Forever: King Edition contains:
Duke Nukem Forever, Duke Playing Cards, Duke Bubblegum, The Ego Boost DLC Duke foldable paper craft, Duke poker chips, Duke mini-cards and Duke radioactive emblem dice.

► **Duke Nukem Forever: Balls of Steel Edition** contains: collectible bust of Duke Nukem, numbered limited edition certificate of authenticity, 100-page hardcover book: *History, Legacy & Legend: Duke Nukem Art from the Vault*, Duke Nukem postcard series, Duke Nukem radioactive emblem sticker, Duke Nukem collectable comic book, Duke Nukem foldable paper craft, Duke Nukem poker chips.

EB GAMES
\$148 (Balls) \$98 (King)
Estimated dispatch date:
May 6

JB HIFI
\$147 (Balls)
Estimated dispatch date:
May 6

GAME
\$139 web only (Balls)
Estimated dispatch date:
May 6

Operation Flashpoint:

Red River
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners
Date: April 21

Thor: God of Thunder
Genre: Action Distributor: Sega
Date: April 28

MAY 2011

No More Heroes
Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Bros.
Date: May 1

LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: May 1

MX vs. ATV Alive
Genre: Racing Distributor: THQ
Date: May 1

Virtua Tennis 4
Genre: Sport Distributor: Sega
Date: May 5

Duke Nukem Forever
Genre: Shooter Distributor: 2K
Date: May 6

Brink
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: May 19

L.A. Noire
Genre: Action-adventure Distributor: Rockstar
Date: May 20

F.E.A.R. 3
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Warner Bros.
Date: May 25

DiRT 3
Genre: Racing Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners
Date: May 25

Dungeon Siege III
Genre: RPG Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: May 26

JUNE 2011

Child of Eden
Genre: Puzzle Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: June TBC

Hunted: The Demon's Forge
Genre: Action Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners
Date: June TBC

Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters
Genre: Action Distributor: Warner Bros.
Date: June 16

inFAMOUS 2
Genre: Action Distributor: Sony
Date: June 30

AUGUST 2011

Deus Ex: Human Revolution
Genre: Shooter/RPG Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners
Date: August 25

SEPTEMBER 2011

Resistance 3
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Sony
Date: September 6

RAGE
Genre: Adventure Distributor: TBC
Date: September 16

OCTOBER 2011

Batman: Arkham City
Genre: Action Distributor: Warner Bros.
Date: October 19

NOVEMBER 2011


Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception
Genre: Action-adventure Distributor: Sony
Date: November 4

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
Genre: RPG Distributor: TBC
Date: November 11

TBC 2011

Tomb Raider
Genre: Action-adventure Distributor: Ubisoft
Date: TBC

Bodycount
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners
Date: TBC

Warhammer 40K: Space Marine
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: TBC

Spec Ops: The Line
Genre: Action Distributor: 2K
Date: TBC

Alice: Madness Returns
Genre: Action Distributor: EA
Date: TBC

Red Faction: Armageddon
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ
Date: TBC

Mass Effect 3
Genre: Action RPG Distributor: EA
Date: TBC

Metal Gear Solid: Rising
Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Date: TBC

Agent
Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar Date: TBC

The Last Guardian
Genre: Adventure Distributor: Sony Date: TBC

Ace Combat: Assault Horizon
Genre: Flight Distributor: Namco Bandai Partners Date: TBC

DmC
Genre: Action Distributor: THQ Date: TBC

Driver: San Francisco
Genre: Racing Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC

Silent Hill: Downpour
Genre: Action Distributor: Mindscape Date: TBC

Max Payne 3
Genre: Action Distributor: Rockstar Date: TBC

Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One
Genre: Platformer Distributor: Sony Date: TBC



SSX: Deadly Descents
Genre: Racing Distributor: Activision Date: TBC

Final Fantasy XIII-2
Genre: RPG Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC

Battlefield 3
Genre: Shooter Distributor: EA Date: TBC

► Pre-order

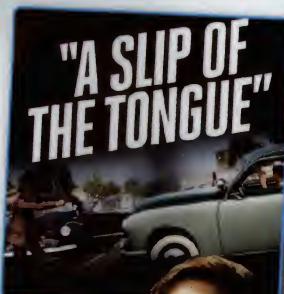
L.A. NOIRE

Amid the post-war boom of Hollywood's Golden Age Cole Phelps, an LAPD detective, is thrown headfirst into a city drowning in its own success. Corruption is rampant, the drug trade is exploding, and murder rates are at an all-time high. Phelps must unravel the truth to uncover a secret that could shake the city to its rotten core.



EB GAMES:

'The Naked City' Vice Case and The Badge Pursuit Challenge – Phelps investigates the apparent suicide of a stunning fashion model. When the young beauty is found naked in her bathroom amidst a pool of pills, the most likely conclusion is that she's taken her own life. But what about those bruises?



JB HIFI:

'A Slip of the Tongue' Traffic Case – in this bonus case a seemingly run of the mill car theft ends up sparking an explosive investigation into the largest auto fraud racket the city has ever seen. With the stolen cars piling up and questionable characters at every turn, can you help Cole Phelps crack the biggest case so far in his career?

GAME:

'The Sharpshooter Detective Suit'
– This pre-order bonus enhances your aim with rifles and pistols.

EB GAMES \$108
JB HIFI \$89
GAME \$82 (web price)
Estimated dispatch date: May 17

The Lord of the Rings: War in the North
Genre: RPG Distributor: Warner Bros. Date: TBC

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier
Genre: Action Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC

Call of Juarez: The Cartel
Genre: Shooter Distributor: Ubisoft Date: TBC



In their WORDS

Industry chatter, inside tips and loose lips



"We never had a freakout moment, we never had a crunch, we never had to work on a weekend and, in fact, we were always running ahead of milestones, so we would even give extra days off when the sky was blue, or something like that."

American McGee on the development of *Alice: Madness Returns* at Shanghai-based company, Spicy Horse



"We went through all kinds of crazy crap! We put a baby in a dumpster and were using that as a bullet shield. We were trying a bunch of very strange ideas."

Christopher Cross, on giving the game its emotional punch



"EA has always respected our punk rock style. It was really easy, and we had a lot of freedom."

Suda 51 on developing *Shadows of the Damned* with the US publisher



"If the first game doesn't work, there won't be a trilogy. It's not complicated."

Danny Bilson on Guillermo del Toro's forthcoming (possible) franchise



"We need to go from version one to version two so that it sells two to three times as many, it finds a much bigger audience."

Frank Gibeau on a sequel to *Mirror's Edge*.



► Limited Edition
inFAMOUS 2

A being of pure power and destruction is annihilating the East Coast. To stop this menace, Cole must find the key to unlocking his undiscovered powers hidden deep within New Marais. Standing in the way is a power-hungry dictator that will stop at nothing to rid him from the city. Gain enough power to defeat The Beast or witness the destruction of the world. Save the world or destroy it.

Special Edition includes: Lenticular cover, DLC items: Electrocution Grenade (an exclusive power which shocks enemies with arcing electricity), Original Cole skin (just in case his redesign isn't to your tastes) and a Golden Amp (the Amp is Cole's new melee weapon of choice).

Hero Edition includes: Cole figurine, Cole's sling bag, Comic Book, Super Voucher containing: original Cole skin, Kessler skin, Gold Amp, Electrocution grenade, Lighting Hook and a Collector's Edition Soundtrack.

JB HIFI \$109 (Special)
EB GAMES \$198 (Hero)
Estimated dispatch date: May 9

JB HIFI \$109 (Special)
EB GAMES \$198 (Hero)
Estimated dispatch date: May 9

CONVERSATIONS AT THE PUB

Part one: It's like you've never seen an acronym before

I was talking to a guy at the pub the other day about videogames. Normally I don't talk about games outside of work much, because while I love gaming it's something that I discuss with other people in the office for 40 hours a week. A change of pace is welcome.

Our short conversation began when I looked at his faded black T-shirt and asked him who (or what) Hipster Twee are (or is). He flicked his too-long fringe out of his right eye with a well-practiced twitch, but still made sure he had his head back to look down at me when he answered. Weird really, because I was at least a head-and-a-half taller than him.

"They play the opening credits from *Phantasy Orokō Shippoukenden Eriti Response IV: Wari's Avengence: New Knowledge, Limited Edition*," he said, patronisingly. "But I don't expect you to know that."

I had heard of the game, only because it was selling its tits off in Japan. The first *Phantasy Orokō* (or *POSER*, if you like) had sold less than 1000 units at retail in Australia. It was a multiplayer, turn-based anime fighting game on PSP that only progressed when you completed a game of cards, and they could only be collected from chance encounters on your way to your next fight. The unskipable cinematics – 20 hours worth, and the only time the game introduced you to new characters and story progression outside of the 100-page instruction manual – lasted for a minimum of 10 minutes each. You're right to assume *POSER IV* could only sell in Japan.

"Oh, okay. You must've imported that," I said. "I made a pre-order at EB Games," he said, "This way they would know that someone likes good games, but they told me they weren't getting it in. Doesn't matter, I only import games. I never buy them in Aus-fail-ia."

I didn't try to reason with this contradiction.

"Gotta admit, we're probably not going to review it," I murmured. "What else have you played lately?"

He rattled off half-a-dozen titles, all of them either turn-based RPGs, bullet-hell shoot 'em ups or PSone mech games ("that's where real gaming is.")

I'm totally fine with people liking what they like. What I don't like is when they use it as a badge of honour. You're not

cooler or smarter than anyone because you play titles the majority of gamers aren't attracted to. This guy could be as obscure as he wanted, leaving his trophy software on a shelf at eye-level so that when people entered his dungeon he could casually mention it takes 100 hours just to master the tutorial. However, when I told him that I was playing a preview build of *Deus Ex: Human Revolution* he just brayed at me.

"What are you playing that piece of shit for?" I didn't catch his mocking glare this time as his fringe had re-draped itself in front of his eyes.

"It's not even out yet," I replied. "How can you write it off so quickly?"

He scoffed. "It's just another over-hyped shooter, part of a series that sold out as soon as it came to PS2."

"It's actually looking incredible. Thoughtful story, and it's more of a hybrid RPG shooter than a generic blow-em-all-to-bits gun-fest," I said, but I was soon cut short. "You –"

"I don't play shooters," he sniffed.

"They do nothing new and there are too many of them. Plus, if a game gets less than 39 out of 40 in Famitsu I don't play it."

This conversation was clearly going nowhere. I finished off my drink and left, and as I looked over my shoulder back into the pub I heard the tinny, opening strains of Hipster Twee through the speakers of a PSP 1000. ▲



OPINION
Paul Taylor

Paul Taylor loves *Ico*, *We Love Katamari*, and *God Hand* as much as *NFS Hot Pursuit*, *Pac-Man CE DX* and *Borderlands*. He also has a large collection of PSone games he still plays.



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SAINTS BLOW

The Saints are marching in again, but would gaming be better off if they didn't?

Mortal Kombat's recent run-in with Australia's dangerously dated classification guidelines will only intensify debate between gamers and the industry's most vocal opponents.

"We're adults," gamers will declare. "Can't we just move past this?"

"Videogames are horrible and depraved and have little to offer," will come the retort.

Then *Saints Row: The Third* will land and, if it's anything like its forebear, will be horrible, depraved and provide critics with all the ammunition they need.

THQ may have just announced the third instalment in its moderately popular *Saints Row* series but it's hard to imagine it'll be any less mean-spirited than the last one. THQ may have scored a goal recently with the surprisingly good *Homefront* but, frankly, more *Saints Row* is about the last thing the videogame industry needs.

The *Saints Row* approach – they're treating us like children so let's rub shit on the walls – is fundamentally flawed on a variety of levels. It's hard to explain to a non-gamer what the point of executing doctors, slaughtering homeless people, using innocent waitresses as human shields and spraying sewage all over the place is.

It's hard because violence in *Saints Row* 2

Congratulations Volition: now I hate the main character and we're less than a minute into the game.

The funny thing is, even Volition were aware of how fine a line *Saints Row* 2 walked.

"We changed the gender of the first character you encounter, since beating a female doctor to death with an IV stand wasn't the impression we wanted to leave with the very first player action in the game," explained lead designer James Tsai in a post-mortem with *IGN.com* back in 2008. "Instead, we have you beat a male doctor to death with an IV stand, to ease you into the killing."

Volition cut out a mission that had you driving a truck full of smuggled underage foreign prostitutes across the city while rival pimps rammed into you, knocking the girls out and cutting into your human trafficking profits. It also cut a mission that had you using a high-pressure fire hose to wash homeless people off the street and into the gutter. The fact they were even considered is a pretty good indication of just how morally bankrupt a project *Saints Row* 2 really was.

At its most odd it rated a chuckle. There is something to be said about watching the kingpin of a major crime syndicate get about in a hot dog costume. At its nastiest, however,

I felt completely alienated. A cutscene mid-game that saw the lead character grab an innocent female bartender and deliberately throw her into a hail of gunfire to shield him from the bullets was the straw that broke this veritable camel's back.

At that point I just wanted my character to die. I couldn't kill him myself, so I just killed the power instead. ▲

"Congratulations Volition: now I hate the main character and we're less than a minute into the game"

wasn't a means to an end; it was a punchline. Violence can be blackly comic, but not here.

When Sackgirl sits down with me while I'm playing a game I can almost always explain away even the most brutal acts of violence, so long as they're paced in context. That wasn't possible with *Saints Row* 2. For instance, if I wanted to shoot someone before dragging them out of their car I'd bloody well pull the trigger myself. Holding a gun while carjacking in *Saints Row* will see your character automatically murderise the occupant, whether you wanted to or not.

I'll concede that, while it's far from pretty, the gameplay of *Saints Row* 2 is largely competent. Yet the unrelenting spitefulness of *Saints Row* 2's agenda quickly and irreversibly undermined its capable foundations.

For me, *Saints Row* 2 was a perfect example of the kind of game that's impossible to defend. It wasn't badly made, but it was badly intentioned. I really don't have time for any game that makes it easier for outsiders to bash gaming as a vapid and sadistic pastime.

I've always felt the cruelty of its violence never suited the game's wacky gangsta pastiche. I was turned off in the first 30 seconds. Kill the doctor! says the game. What? The one that nursed my mass-murdering arse back to health after it was blown off in a boat explosion? Why?



OPINION Angry Sackboy

Angry Sackboy believes games are art, although concedes *Saints Row* 2 is a pretty good argument they're not.





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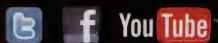


PS3
PlayStation 3



Strong War
Violence and
coarse language

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inbox

▼ LETTER OF THE MONTH



A FOOT IN BOTH CAMPS

Hey OPS!

I'm writing to let you know what I think about online.

One of the best feelings you can get when you can get playing online is that last little kill that you never expected to go anywhere and it turns out being the winning kill. For example; seeing the bullet (or tomahawk/knife) fly straight into the enemy in SLOW-MO!

In the dog eat dog world of online gaming, it's kill or be killed. *Call of Duty* rewards you for every kill you get - whether it be points or kill streaks.

However, the one thing I hate about online gaming is the people who run at you shooting while you're in the middle of the battlefield. There are bullets flying everywhere and you want to sprint at me? Okay, odds are you'll never kill me anyway.

Whatever happened to a good old firefights? One team on one side shooting the opposing force. Now all you ever see is people running around like chickens without heads!

Seriously what is actually wrong with camping? Why does everyone hate it so much? I only camp when I'm using my trusty rifle - a bolt action sniper with ACOG + silencer (red camo).

I personally think that camping is very tactical. Sure it's annoying at times, but it's still a smart way to go. So OPS, what do you guys think?

Alec Waddell, via email

Well, first off we most definitely share your love of slow-mo death and sniper rifles. Ever since *Max Payne* we have loved watching our bullet-cams zing along to their (crotch-based) targets.

Bulletstorm

kicked that mechanic up a notch with its sweet directable sniper rounds. You should all check that out if you haven't already.

With regards to camping, we can only say that the people who are against it aren't idiots - they just have a very different mentality to your own.

When virtual war is declared, two types of gamers enlist. First up are the military enthusiasts who hope to emulate the exact tactics and strategies that real-life soldiers would exhibit in a bonafide, think-and-you're-dead warzone.

This is fair enough. God knows Treyarch and Infinity Ward went to stupid lengths to recreate each gun and environment with an obsessive amount of attention to realistic detail.

The other type of online player is your typical gunslinger. They know this is a game with a leaderboard, they know the parameters and they're constantly running around trying to do some bulk buy, wholesale killin'.

The experience of being a soldier is the last thing on their mind; they want kills, XP and more kills. Death means squat when you have a million up your sleeve.

Now for some reason, both types of players don't mix very well at parties. Campers see gunslingers as mindless bloodthirsty scope-fodder. Gunslingers mistake a camper's patience and cunning for cheapness and a lack of cajones. Neither group has it correct.

So camp all you want and laugh your arse off when some sook can't handle it after you put a round through his ears. Might is always right.

Speak to us!

Love the mag? Hate the mag? We want your opinions and questions on OPS, on games - on anything that you feel the need to share with your fellow readers. The best letter of each issue wins a great prize! Write to us on paper or on a computer at:

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LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS A COPY OF:

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Pop this Blu-ray in your PS3 and enjoy the eyeball party!



All created equal?

Tall poppy syndrome

Dear OPS,

The 24th of February saw the release of the latest instalment of the *Killzone* series in *Killzone 3*. Since then I have seen so much hate for this game coming from everywhere, from players on forums to reviewers on podcasts, shows and written reviews. Now, while I don't think it deserves the hate it's getting, I'll admit it does have its faults.

I know that a review is one person's opinion and doing one to a deadline is stressful and takes away the enjoyment of the game. But it makes me wonder how some get their jobs when watching a show on games that one reviewer said the story was the weakest point in the game, and it didn't tell him why he was fighting!

What the?!

This statement came right after he said the story picked up from the end of *Killzone 2*. Well how about this, dumb arse: you just killed the leader of a planet you were invading. All the ships that brought you there have left or been destroyed and you are now being hunted by the entire planet. So you are fighting to survive until some form of rescue arrives or you find a way off the planet. Really, the plot in the story wasn't hard to see. Perhaps that reviewer should get Stevie Wonder to play the games and write the review.

Now the game itself is beautiful. The graphics are stunning but where the rest of the hate is coming is players of *Killzone 2* saying the multiplayer in *Killzone 3* isn't the same as 2. Of course it isn't; they are two different games. Okay, there are some patches that need to happen to fix some glitches and bugs but every game has that. Even still, a lot of players are complaining that the sniper has a full-auto rifle and can cloak so they sit there and camp. Every game has campers. Bloody well adapt and kill the campers. Yes, it's slightly harder in this game but this isn't *Call of Duty*; it's a different beast all together. Learn to play it as it is. Don't ask for it to be changed into something else.

My only gripe with it is it doesn't allow custom games like *Killzone 2* did, but has dedicated servers and matchmaking rather than a player hosting. The only reason this peeves me is that it makes it hard for me to run my clan tournament on this game if more than eight people show up to play. While there are rumours that a custom game will be patched in, until then I will play the game as it was intended and adapt my tournament to work around the max of eight players per squad. And that's only if we are unlucky that we can't all get into the same game.

Overall I love this game despite its faults and I think it will be a great game for this year's Tournament. But really, why hate on a game if it doesn't live up to the hype. Guerrilla Games didn't wreck this game by not making it the same as *Killzone 2*. *Killzone 3* is a different game and variety is always good. I'd recommend this game to anyone who loves a visually beautiful game, and a fast-paced story with some great set pieces towards the end. It's got a solid MP and a offline co-op to boot. It has its faults so it's not a 10, but it's easily a solid 8 or 9.

That's my rant over. Cheers.

Mate White, via email



So beautiful...

"I was just blown away with everything that I saw about that game. It was a thing of beauty, but out of reach..."

You've got a good attitude there Matt.
Games usually aren't perfect but, as long as they're made with sort of dedication and care that Guerrilla Games are famous for, there'll be plenty of fun to experience. Honestly, some people just don't know how to curb their own enthusiasm.

We loved *Killzone 3* but we are aware of the faults you mention and also the way it has become a target for naysayers. Why the hate? Well, when you're an exclusive FPS, visual juggernaut that stands as an unofficial flagship for a system you tend to become a magnet for flak and random idiocy.

Haters gonna hate, man. Keep having fun and be sure to keep that *Killzone* stocked full of dead people for us.

I'm okay, you're okay

Firstly to all you guys, fantastic mag! 10/10 from me.

Reading Jess Page's contribution in the February 2011 issue got me thinking about fanboys and here is my two cents on the subject.

I am in my mid 30s and love my games! I have both the Xbox 360 and the PS3. Why you may ask? Do I make too much money? I wish. Do I like to show-off? Maybe a little bit, the PS3 does look sexy. Or do I just like to clutter my entertainment unit?

It goes back to a few years now when *Uncharted 2* came out and at that time I did not have a PS3. I was just blown away with everything that I saw about that game. It was a thing of beauty, but out of reach for the Xbox gamer. Any conversation around it used to incite a rant from me on games being console exclusive. These rants hit a peak when *Uncharted 2* became the Game of the Year.

Then came *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. I bought the Xbox version only to find out that you could play as the Joker – only on the PS3! The rants hit a peak. I lost a lot of friends during this time.

I had enough with all these console exclusivity and thought to myself that there is no use ranting or whining about console exclusivity. If I want to play these great games, I had to widen my gaming horizons. I picked up my PS3, loaded *Uncharted 2* and cursed myself when I realised what I had been missing over the years.

Now I get to play all exclusive titles on both consoles and I'm living in gaming nirvana. No more whining or ranting! Both PS3 and Xbox side-by-side harmoniously in my entertainment unit and I haven't heard any bickering between the two yet.

Killing the competition

Hey OPS,

I just wanted to write in to say that though some games earn 10s there can still be significant flaws in them. The first example I would like to point out is, of course, the well known *Call of Duty* series. Treyarch's latest game *Black Ops* contains too many minor connection problems. Then Xbox got the first DLC, First Strike (which contained glitches). They still got their DLC for only \$15, while we have to pay \$23 through the PlayStation Store.

Killzone 3 is another very good game, no doubt about it. But it annoyed me to see that the reason the good guys start losing on the damned psycho planet is because nobody is following their orders. That's right, the orders. In nearly the whole story I always hear, "We got to follow the orders." But no one actually does it. It gets tired pretty quickly.

Moving on, I recently got *GTA IV*. *GTA* can be very... I hate to say it... boring. The missions are basically go kill some people, steal something, go kill more people in a police helicopter and basically that's all. But it can be fun when you put in some cheats on your phone and summon a helicopter to go to jump off the Rotterdam tower.

But OPS, you are all times great and I've been subscribing for more magazines filled with 100% Australian goodness. Keep up the great work!

Jeremy Kandy, via email

True, 10 out of 10 games can sometimes feel like lesser experiences (especially when online multiplayer glitches are discovered). A 10 in OPS means the best of the best at any given time. They might have minor flaws but they'll be the games that are leaders in their fields. Incidentally, if *GTA* is boring you, try *Just Cause 2*.

Cuttings

► Turn the valve

Valve needs to be a little less stingy with their game releases. At least make two to three games a year!

Saed Batshon,
via Facebook

In our weaker moments we totally agree. We love Valve games and they're typically of the highest standard. But a lot of that comes from its 'It'll be ready when it's ready' attitude.

► Blongk!

Gaming is life, real life is just a hobby. Trophies are everything, obey your game: PlayStation!

Skywarp Greer,
via Facebook

Trophy unlocked: made OPS totally agree with you and feel worried at the same time.

► Verily

Don't care what anyone else says. I think *Dragon Age II* rocks.

Sharlene Gardiner,
via Facebook

This is the right attitude to have.

► Banhammer?

Is *L.A. Noire* going to be banned in Australia because of the map of Tasmania in the game?

Henry Stillman,
via Facebook

No, it's already been rated MA15+. It's nothing you can't see on a late night crime show on TV.

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▼ Storefront

What deliciousness have you bought lately?



Che Patterson

Battlefield: Bad Company 2

"Ace single player mode. If it had an offline skirmish mode with bots it would have been perfect."



Marc Murkin

Dragon Age II

"The Signature Edition. I thought it was odd getting a mouse pad free since it's a PlayStation game. Still, it makes for a really wide space to put my drink."



Grant Mackie

Fight Night Champion

"It's awesome and intensely quick."



Geordie McDonald

Mass Effect 2

"I didn't think it was going to be as awesome as it is!"



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incoming

This Month

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DiRT 3

In mud we trust

The Pitch

Core rally experience of *DiRT*, plus the easy-to-access bits of *DiRT 2*, and Ken Block's insane Gymkhana compounds

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: RACING

EXPECTED RELEASE:

MAY 24

DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO

BANDAI PARTNERS

DEVELOPER:

CODEMASTER

PLAYERS: 1-8

Getting your hands on *DiRT 3* is like stepping into a brand new pair of your favourite shoes. It's simultaneously fresh but familiar, exciting but reliable. In short, it's the opposite of the lurid world of *DiRT 2* that was more about attitude than authenticity. We have a feeling you're going to love it.

DiRT 3 is about getting real rallying back into the series. "We looked at what people were playing online [in *DiRT 2*] – what the most popular cars were, which tracks they were racing on – and what

we found was there just wasn't enough rally," says Codemaster's communications manager Andy Gray. "You are very much a professional rally driver now, and the core of your career is in rally," he continues, talking about *DiRT 3*'s career mode. "To give you an idea it's about 60 per cent [rallying]."

There are still a lot of events from other disciplines though, as the game still has, as Gray describes, an 'action-sports attitude' but don't expect chatter from competitors goading you mid-event.

The action-sports tag refers to your career, as the story continues on from *DiRT*

3. The beat-up RV has gone and you now have more of a name for yourself.

You also have an agent who will be pushing for you to put gymkhana videos up on YouTube (see 'Getting

Fit at the Gym') and you get the DC Sports compound to thrash the Ford Fiesta in.

The compound acts as a playground to do stunts and drifts and it's where you practice your own gymkhana floorwork. London's iconic Battersea power station was the backdrop for the stage that we saw and got to tear around in. It's a spot where the game is more like *Skate* than *Colin McRae*; you have a bunch of tricks and manoeuvres you need to check off your list and you need to do them as quickly as possible.

While we had six tricks on our list for the demo build, there were enough ramps, barrels, poles and tunnels in the area to make dozens more stunts to perform. We did doughnuts round a power pole then under the arm and around the cab of a nearby excavator, before thundering sideways through three loosely strewn pipes, just wide enough to accommodate the Fiesta. There were also boxes to demolish and a couple of ramps to fly over and land on.

It's a section that threatens to wear out start buttons on DualShocks worldwide





Getting fit at the Gym

If you've never heard of or seen one of Ken Block's spectacular gymkhana videos you need to check them out immediately. They're a show of technical mastery in a 650hp machine - the Ford Fiesta - that does zero to 100km/h in less than two seconds. In fact, by the time it takes you to say 'in less than two seconds' you're already breaking the speed limit on most of Australia and New Zealand's highways. Go to www.dcsneakers.com/gym3/#/videos/info to see the Fiesta in action, or search YouTube for 'Ken Block Gymkhana' for Mr. DC Shoes tearing up harbours in a Subaru WRX.

(we had several moments of swear, pause, restart). We were instantly addicted to trying to link the tricks together perfectly, trimming seconds off our time spent in the compound. Though the 'flashback' system returns - the function that allows you to turn back time by 10 or so seconds for another chance - we only had one opportunity to rewind. This may not be final, and in the main races we're happy to assume you'll have more flashbacks based on what difficulty level you choose.

The Fiesta's one of dozens of cars in *DiRT 3* that's been meticulously modelled, and the incredible powerful hatchback is like a terrier. It's instantly responsive and quite scary to wrestle with. Jamming your finger down on the accelerator is fine in a straight line for sheer wow factor, but weaving it between or around anything needs micro management on the thumbstick and **DS**.

DiRT 3's always had excellent handling, and it won't take long for series vets to get their motors just where they want them. The car list is less Nissan 370Z and Pontiac Solstice and more Mitsubishi Echos with lashings of Subaru WRX - machines that deserve to be threaded through sunlit forests and over Kenyan plains. A Trailblazer stage - wider track than a normal

rally with cars that look at ease going up a mountain - set an Audi Quattro in Finland and the group B car felt much heavier than the nimble Fiesta. There's more life on the track this time as well, with bystanders lined up on key corners and some daring spectators running off the track as we thundered down it.

It's more involved in terms of representing all the moving parts on cars, too. We caught a rough bit of track and rode the Quattro on two wheels. Looking at it in a slow-motion replay we saw the tyres flexing and squirm about on the rim and the suspension contracting independently at each corner of the car. Even at this physical state the game is graphically faultless.

You'll do yourself a massive favour with a good set of headphones or the surround sound turned up to appreciate the sound of gravel spitting up on to metal, exhaust pops and straining motors. Paul Coleman, *DiRT 3*'s senior game designer, told us that cars are going to be introduced in terms of decades so you'll see and understand the differences between them all. They've already built the original Mini, and when we were playing the game they were just about to sign the deal with BMW to officially licence it.

The return to real rallying also means the return to snow and ice - the first time since *Colin McRae 2005*. *F1 2010*'s weather system has been employed and modified to help describe the multitude of different surfaces, so while the main part of a track may be slushy the snow banks at the edges will be much more solid and likely to spin you around if you clip them. It's an important and clever tweak to the weather system.

The *Colin McRae* moniker may be completely dropped, but the spirit of the games from before the Scot's time with *DiRT* is back. **Paul Taylor**

D-Box

In Codemasters' Leamington Spa campus they not only have their own pub and a *GRID* arcade machine, they also have a bespoke racing simulator called a D-Box that's hooked up to a PC. The D-Box is a racing seat - complete with harness - with four pistons that accurately reflect a vehicle's movements up to 4Gs. We strapped ourselves in, literally, and with an imposing ménage à trois of three widescreen monitors and surround sound launched ourselves down a dusty Kenyan track. It felt like being kicked in the back and ribs for a couple of minutes as the Fiesta rocketed through pockets of villages. Very cool, but very expensive: expect to pay £15,000 (\$24,000) for one in your own home. Also not compatible for PS3. Sorry.



PS3
PlayStation 3

SAVE THE WORLD?



They Say

"Without a doubt the car handling in *DiRT 3* is the best it's ever been."

We Say

Spot on. There'll be a tonne of tracks to slide and poke through and the ballistic gymkhana events are a gratifying way to thrash seven shades out of insane cars.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING

PS3

SONY
make.believe

Ah yes, the g-banger of +12 protection. Impervious – or is it?

Hunted: The Demon's Forge

If it's on the menu

It's been a while between drinks since our last time with the co-operative adventurer known as *Hunted: The Demon's Forge*. In the past few months there's been a lot of tinkering under the hood. All for the better, mind you. As we shook off the jetlag cobwebs in delightful Beverly Hills, Los Angeles we prepared to embark on our journey into the unknown.

As we were set to get reacquainted with the controls developer Maxx Kaufman was quick to point out that the controls may very well have had a tweak since we last met up, so it was probably in our best interests to go through the opening and get accustomed to the new system. This hands-on was a little different to what we're used to; it was a co-op affair with a peer from New Zealand. It gave us a feel for what inXile Entertainment is touting its "co-op at a distance".

You have the choice between two wildly different characters, El'ara and Caddoc. Caddoc is a muscle-bound behemoth resembling, in look and tone, Brit brick

Jason Statham. He favours anything that can cleave you in twain and is voiced by Graeme McTavish, soon to be starring in *The Hobbit*. The other gorgeous half of this dynamic duo, El'ara, is an Elvin goddess with a longbow hair trigger and the sultriest swagger known to both man and womankind (supplied by sensational motion capture actress Michelle Lee). This odd couple handle completely differently, with Caddoc all about close quarters and El'ara an expert from afar. They can both switch to each other's off weapon, but it lacks the same oomph as their stock standard.

We meet our heroes with Caddoc in the midst of a nightmarish vision. Wandering alone in the dark he is following the voice of Seraphine (see '(Law)less is more') by torchlight. The dream reaches its zenith as Caddoc is confronted by a huge horned demonic entity seeking to feast on his entrails and he spies a strange stone off in the distance. Bolting upright, he wakes beside a campfire with El'ara musing if it

had a "happy ending". Dismissing the bad dream as the product of bad boar meat and lustful thoughts towards a beer wench he fancied, neither could predict what it was a precursor for.

As they set off on their merry way, they come across a strange stone not dissimilar to the one in Caddoc's nightmare and, as he yells a warning at El'ara, she grabs it and a portal emerges. The white skinned tribute to Goths, Seraphine, materialises and (initially perturbed that El'ara had grabbed the stone as opposed to Caddoc) she charges both with a quest promising fame, fortune and glory. It appears that the "Deathstone" is a conduit to the other side and is the method to access audio clues for side quests and history of the land.

It's a really neat touch to force the player to wholeheartedly engage the plot, at the risk of missing a vital piece of information and forgo the mission entirely. Gracing both with another glimpse of fallen champions, they see a fearless warrior facing off against dragons but before either could drink it in all hell breaks loose.

Lightning crashes and skeletal warriors manifest before our duo. The revamped controls have moved melee attacks to face buttons, with ranged and magic attacks on the top buttons. It handles well. We took El'ara for a spin first and slammed into cover while our partner gave Caddoc's melee a whirl. We casually picked off enemies one by one, strategically retreating to gain higher ground and letting loose volley after volley. There's a *Call of Duty* style snap-to for the reticule and you can really fire with great haste. Wearing down these bag of bones' health afforded the opportunity to try an execution move. When prompted you fire an arrow at your unfortunate soon-to-be-pincushion and the camera follows the arrow to the coup de grâce as you sit back, relax and enjoy the ride.

Caddoc was momentarily overwhelmed and we had a taste of this whole co-op at a distance thing. Instead of having to wade through a half dozen enemies to get to him

The Pitch

A co-operative dungeon crawler with a strong fighting component and *Uncharted* styled mechanics

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ADVENTURE

EXPECTED RELEASE:

JUNE 2011

DISTRIBUTOR: BETHESDA

SOFTWORKS

DEVELOPER: inXILE

ENTERTAINMENT

PLAYERS: 1-2

This: is the quickening





PS3
PlayStation 3

OR SAVE YOURSELF?



"Don't be so gutless' they said. 'Go chat her up with your boner line' they said. Great advice guys"

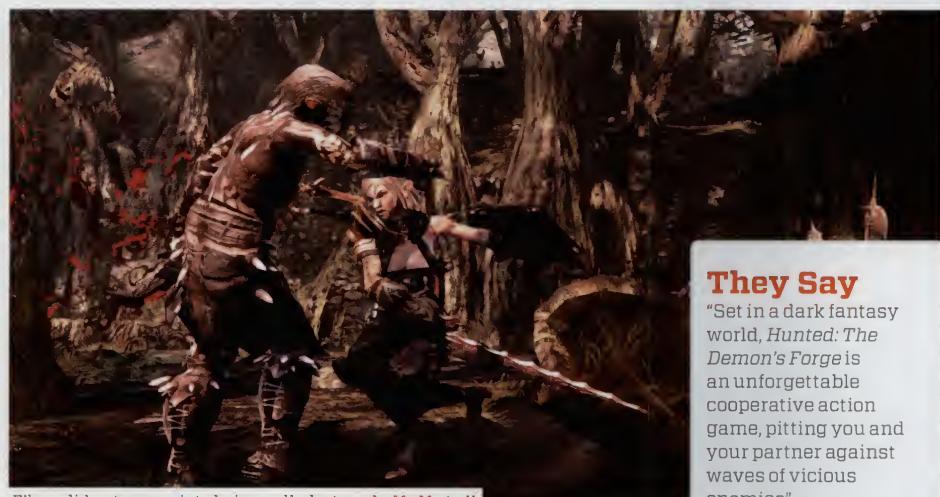
for the revive we simply pitched a resurrection crystal over to him, it exploded, he got up and inflicted righteous retribution. So simple, yet amazingly effective. That wasn't the end of E'lara's quiver of tricks either. To solve many puzzles she'll have to light her arrows with specific flames or hit certain marks with some truly testing our addled brain.

It was then time to switch it up at one of the many crystal interchanges in each section. Here, in either single or co-op, you can change characters and open up an entirely different dimension of play. Caddoc moves with a slower, more deliberate pace, utilising two attacks. A quicker light blow, and a stiff-armed heavy attack. He also has a Fury Meter which, when filled from completing regular hits, unleashes a devastating flourish. Combined with a little bit of magic it makes short work of any unholy horror – and that's

only the faltering first steps you'll take in *Hunted*.

You can power up yourself and your partner with magic known as Battle Charging, infusing their weapons with an elemental boost. You can upgrade your arsenal and magic with Seraphine's help. There are side quests to uncover with some kind of treasure bonus along the way and there are even multiple endings and a delicious conundrum throughout your entire adventure. A magical liquid named Sleg can be imbibed to grant you fantastical abilities, but each dose comes with a price and it's not immediately apparent, or what you expect.

Hunted is certainly forging its own path. It's taking something familiar and turning it on its head to create a dungeon crawling experience that's not just about action, nor solely an RPG, sitting somewhere in the middle and favouring neither. **Dave Kozicki**



E'lara did not appreciate being called a top shelf elf at all!

(Law)less is more

The big announcement of the playtest we had in LA was the revelation of who was behind the voice of one of the main characters, and your guide throughout the quest: Seraphine. No stranger to swords and sorcery, it was our New Zealand neighbour Lucy Lawless. Seraphine acts as your go-between with the spirit world and gives you all manner of juicy unlocks, abilities and information, if the price is right. As mischievous as the lady who brings her to life, we're expecting a whole bunch of mixed messages and duality from Seraphine. Best to sleep with one eye open around her.



They Say

"Set in a dark fantasy world, *Hunted: The Demon's Forge* is an unforgettable cooperative action game, pitting you and your partner against waves of vicious enemies"

We Say

Every time we have a gander, it keeps getting better and better and this hands-on was no exception.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK
GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING



SONY
make.believe

Inversion

Fun with gravity

Newton would be spinning in his grave. Literally. In the future you'll be able to walk around with gravity-defying and -altering backpacks with guns called Grapplers. You'll have objects floating into the air, or yank them towards you and blast them off as makeshift projectiles, before tilting the world 90 degrees and making the walls your floors. Spider-Man just lost his gimmick.

Whatever his name is and his bunch of Action Heroes barrel around Some City with blue-glowing backpacks taking out the ???, whoever they are. Whatever. *Inversion*'s plot isn't its selling point and makes up for it in the gameplay twist.

Inversion's a lot like *Army of Two* and *Dark Void* (you can stop cringing now), but better looking and (hopefully) with less crap bits. It's third-person, cover-based fare with a sparkly HD sheen and, while we didn't see any gratuitous fist bumping or agro tactics, we're assuming they're still going to be built in. Looking at the title screen there's an option for co-op right under the main single-player campaign.

When the world turns sideways you have true verticality. Not everything's affected when you walk the walls. Enemies on the ground stick there, so grenades you lob go in a curious corkscrew as they follow the two sets of forces. From what

we saw these perpendicular moments are pre-scripted, so it's not like you can do a Neo and betray physics at a whim.

The gravity gun is damn useful, making people float like apples in water, and while they squirm trying to free themselves from your grasp they'll still loose a few shots at you. Or, you can focus your force into an intense blast and make them explode in a gory spray.

The gameplay's a bunch of set pieces and we saw some fairly rigid beats. We rocked up to a plaza strewn with rubble and gutted cars. A minigun was handily pointed at a crippled hotel laced with bad guys, and as we stitched the building with lead the façade came tumbling down. The hotel's sign slowly fell off and the masonry impressively crumbled.

Less promising was the car that was indestructible before we triggered the next event, but then went up like a bonfire of petrol and match heads once the next wave of enemies came through. Still, the level of destruction is roughly on-par with *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, and as we ducked behind cover the stonework chipped away while the soft blue of our backpack glowed against concrete blocks.

There's still a year of development time left on *Inversion* but at this stage the gravity gimmick has us hooked and it looks far too pretty for a game in an early state. It'll live and die on the ability of the Grappler and when the world-tilting antics are triggered. Come 2012 we'll know if it's turning our world upside down.  **Paul Taylor**

Please don't call it 'blindfiring', it's 'visually impaired ammo pissing'

The Pitch

The sideways bits of *Dark Void* meets the cover antics of *Army of Two* and the scowling shouting voices of generic heroes in jeans

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

EXPECTED RELEASE: TBA

2012

DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO

BANDAI PARTNERS

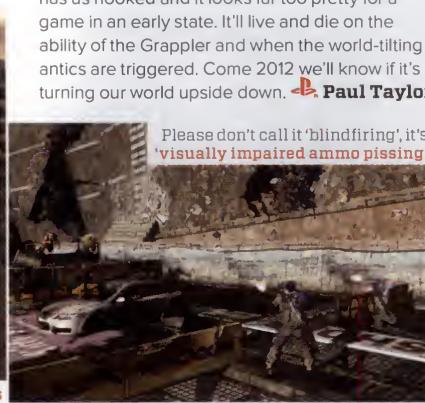
DEVELOPER: SABER

INTERACTIVE

PLAYERS: 1-TBA



It's like Peter Pan, with moderately priced sedans and headshots



Please don't call it 'blindfiring', it's 'visually impaired ammo pissing'

They Say

"*Inversion* combines hard-hitting, adrenaline-pumping action with a revolutionary gravity manipulation engine. Featuring the Grappler weapon, players will be able to manipulate gravity for their own purposes"

We Say

There are stacks of standard action games out there so Saber needs to make the gimmick compelling or turn *Inversion* into a highly produced title. Gents, you have a year to choose your path.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE
NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL
LOOKING GOOD
GREAT STUFF
SURE-THING



PS3
PlayStation 3

infAMOUS 2

BEING A HERO
IS OPTIONAL.



IN STORES JUNE 2011

infamousthegame.com

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[Check the Classification](#)



SONY
make.believe



The Pitch

Aussie rules on PS3
for the first time

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: SPORTS
EXPECTED RELEASE:
APRIL 2011
DISTRIBUTOR: TRU BLU
GAMES
DEVELOPER: BIG ANT
PLAYERS: 1-8

"Hands off boys: this Mark is still taken"

Meat 'n Potatoes, Cut Lunch or Lunch Pack?

AFL Live

Some kind of SPATFA is virtually inevitable...

Deep in the heartland of rugby league it's hard for us to get as excited about *AFL Live* as we were for *Rugby League Live*. We know Aussie rules rules outside of NSW and Queensland and we know the AFL Grand Final is currently the highest attended club championship event in the world. Still, half the population of Australia lives in NSW and Queensland. Plus it doesn't really help that the highest paid AFL footballer is a former NRL superstar; but let's not turn this into a pointless pissing contest.

AFL Live will feature motion captured moves from real players; arguably a bit of a shame if, like us, you saw real potential in what NaturalMotion did with *Backbreaker*. We fear *AFL Live* may lack some of the smoothness we've come to appreciate this generation, and *Rugby League Live* wasn't a great example of buttery animation.

Team-based strategies based on your personal style of play will play a part and there'll be custom player and team options.

We were happy to note that two commentators will feature: Dennis Cometti and Brian Taylor. *Rugby League Live* suffered from bare commentary with only one voice. It's unnatural; there's never just one commentator. We haven't heard Taylor since he went to 3AW but he was very good as part of Triple M's AFL call. Note to Tru Blu: get Dan Ginnane from Triple M's *Dead Set Legends* to call the next rugby league game.

Rugby League Live didn't indicate to us that Big Ant had any real love of the game in their Victorian souls. Perhaps the crew will do better with a sport closer to their hearts. A source close to the project assures us it's a step up from *Rugby League Live*, but we haven't been shown the game yet.

Luke Reilly

They Say

"Take massive speckies! Kick miraculous bananas from the boundary and unleash mighty torpedoes!"

We Say

Nothing. We're waiting until we've had a hands-on before we say anything.

Verdict

BAD SHAPE

NEEDS WORK

GOT POTENTIAL

LOOKING GOOD

GREAT STUFF

SURE-THING



DBOILED

IN A FORMER WOOLSHED, BURIED IN THE SYDNEY SUBURB OF ULTIMO, THE FINISHING TOUCHES ARE BEING MASSAGED INTO THE LARGEST VIDEOGAME EVER MADE IN AUSTRALIA: L.A. NOIRE.

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN DEVELOPER TEAM BONDI AND PUBLISHER ROCKSTAR, L.A. NOIRE IS SET TO BE ONE OF 2011'S BIGGEST BLOCKBUSTERS. SEVEN YEARS, HUNDREDS OF PROGRAMMERS, MORE THAN 300 ACTORS AND ONE 2,200 PAGE SCRIPT LATER? YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SPEECHLESS

WORDS: LUKE REILLY

It was hardboiled American crime author Raymond Chandler who wrote that in L.A. to be conspicuous you would have to drive a flesh-pink Mercedes-Benz with a sun porch on the roof and three pretty girls sunbathing.

We're approaching our first crime scene in *L.A. Noire* and it's suddenly clear that inconspicuousness is the last thing on the agenda of one sick Californian. The body of a young Hispanic woman lies on the ground, naked and mutilated. Hovering over the corpse we inspect her in real time. Using the controller we can select four points on the body to examine: the head, the arms and the torso.

We eyeball the horrible wounds she's suffered to her neck. With his fingers on her chin, Detective Cole Phelps gently rolls the victim's head from side to side as we move the analogue stick back and forth. There's obvious trauma to her skull; she's been tortured.

We have Phelps move down her body to her arms. He lifts each arm and, with a flick of the stick, he twists each one slowly. There are deep cuts to her wrists and her ring finger has been degloved – her wedding ring ruthlessly wrenched from it by her killer.

It's an appalling sight; something as inherently and classically elegant as a nude woman now totally lifeless and

utterly destroyed. But it gets worse. Much worse.

Scrawled on her stomach in lipstick is a message: Kiss the Blood. BD.

Phelps thinks it's the work of The Black Dahlia killer – or the Black Dahlia Avenger as he called himself in the letters he wrote to newspapers. His jaded partner Galloway thinks it's the work of a copycat.

We shift our attention to surrounding alley. As Phelps nears a clue the controller rumbles and tinkle of piano keys hint at something of note nearby. The trail of blood and clues leads up a ladder, then to a nearby rooftop and to more key clues. Someone, it would appear, wanted us to be up here.

Someone *really* wants to be noticed.

THE BIG HEAT

"I think that the original decision behind the game is if you want to do crime or thrillers and stuff you walk into an airport bookstore and it's everywhere, right?" says Team Bondi chief Brendan McNamara. "And this little space marines thing is in this little category up the back."

"I like science fiction but there's this really broad thing there: why haven't we done this in games? You turn on the TV and it's police procedurals and in movies it's really big as well. Just on

"THERE'S MORE TO THE COMPANY THAN JUST GTA OR RED DEAD REDEMPTION"



a basic level you go, 'Well, there's this huge playing field out there that we've never even touched.' Why is that?"

McNamara makes a fine point. Police procedurals like *Law & Order: SVU*, *CSI*, *NCIS* and *Hawaii Five-0* hog the airspace and rate well. Bookstores are lined with popular crime fiction. Real-life crime continues to shock and fascinate.

The audience is there for a genre-defining adventure game that combines the intrigue of investigation with the freedom of an open-world. It's the right time, and Team Bondi and Rockstar are hoping *L.A. Noire* is the right game.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND

L.A. Noire has been McNamara's focus since he arrived back in Australia in 2004. His 20-year stint in the UK, which culminated in *The Getaway* (which he also directed), ended when he returned down under to raise his kids – but it was beginning of something else. Something quite huge.

"Yeah, it's the only thing we've done since we've been down here," says McNamara. "Six of us came out from London and got started on it and started doing the research and stuff because, as you've seen, it's pretty tightly researched. That's what we set up to do and that's what we have done and it's been pretty all-consuming."

L.A. Noire is a different sort of game to its highest-profile Rockstar stablemates but Jeronimo Barrera, Rockstar's VP of product development, is quick to stress there's more to the company than just *GTA* or *Red Dead Redemption*.

"Well, we had *Table Tennis*. We did *Beaterator*. I think we hit the spectrum on a lot of different levels with our titles," says Barrera. "To us we just wanna make cool fun stuff, and we think this is definitely f-king cool, and definitely fun, in a new way."

"When we were showing *GTA IV* for the first time, people were like, 'What do mean there's no levels? What do you mean I have to pick the mission I wanna go on?' We created a new paradigm and I think we're doing the



same thing. We're creating sort of a new genre."

Barrera likens *L.A. Noire* to what Rockstar did with *Red Dead Redemption*; aiming for success in a genre not known for its blockbusters by going above and beyond normal expectations.

"As gamers we were always going 'When's the next great Western going to come out?' and then we were able to do something pretty cool in that environment. Now we're doing the same thing with adventure gaming," says Barrera. "Some of our first experiences playing games were point and click adventure games and lately with the iPad and everything else there's been some resurgence in that, and the episodic gaming that Telltale Games is doing."

"There's definitely a crowd there that wants a more cerebral experience and what we're doing is we're taking that cerebral experience but we're extruding it in the way that Rockstar likes to do things, which is like, 'Let's over-design this thing and make it a

4. FREEZE!

We'll avoid too many more spoilers but when we confront the suspect he rabbits and initiates a hectic foot chase through the back of his store and out onto the street. A warning shot is required to stop the fleeing man, which Phelps will do once a circular meter on your aiming reticle fills to maximum. You need to aim at his back for a short time to build up the meter. Cleverly, a bus will pull into view as you sprint across a busy street, which interrupts your aim, but once in the park on the other side your suspect has nowhere to run.

5. BREAK HIM

Now it's time to interrogate him. He claims his gun was stolen a few years back, but we open our notebook and consult the evidence. There's more to this story than meets the eye – but that'll be up to you to discover.

BUYER BEWARE

We play through an exclusive case from early on in Phelps' career – the case that cements his place as one of the city's finest detectives.

1. BROAD DAYLIGHT

One never-before-seen case we played called 'Buyer Beware'. This case is Phelps' big chance to prove himself worthy of a detective gig to the higher-ups. While walking his beat downtown Phelps happens upon a recent shooting outside a shoe-store. Phelps' partner Ralph Dunn encourages us to try and stick a fork in this before the homicide dicks arrive (his words) and we oblige.



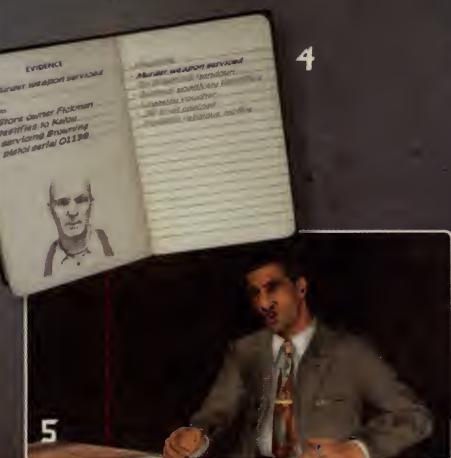
2. ABOUT A GIRL

An examination of the body reveals a document that will come in handy shortly and, after quickly canvassing the immediate areas for any further evidence, a witness tells Phelps a woman ran back inside the store after the shooting.



3. THE MURDER WEAPON

The woman inside the store is Clovis Galetta, an employee of the victim – Everett Gage – who is the owner of the store. The first time we played the case we pressed her too hard and she clammed up. It meant we had to do a little more legwork to find out what really happened, including tracking down a nearby gunstore owner and cross-checking his service records. On our second playthrough we were able to squeeze more info out of her, including the suspect's name and where he discarded the weapon.



A dramatic, low-angle shot of a man in a trench coat and fedora, looking down at a map spread out on a table. The lighting is moody, with strong shadows and highlights. The man's expression is serious and focused. The map shows a coastal region with various locations marked.

"THE AUDIENCE IS THERE
FOR A GENRE-DEFINING
ADVENTURE GAME THAT
COMBINES THE INTRIGUE
OF INVESTIGATION WITH
THE FREEDOM OF AN
OPEN-WORLD"



"OPEN-WORLD TROPS STILL FEATURE BUT L.A. NOIRE'S AMAZINGLY DETAILED WORLD IS MORE A STUNNING BACKDROP THAN A GIANT PLAY GYM"

breathing world.' It's not a sandbox, but it does lend itself so well to this sort of adventure gaming. Where usually you'd click on a point on the map to go to your next location now in this case you drive or you let your partner drive."

Open-world tropes like discoverable items (in this case, Los Angeles landmarks), random crimes and the ability to 'commandeer' civilian vehicles still feature but *L.A. Noire*'s amazingly detailed world is more a stunning backdrop than a giant play gym. However, this more than suits the style of play because a cerebral experience it most certainly is. The patient pace is interrupted occasionally by a fistfight or shootout here and a car chase or foot pursuit there, but much of *L.A. Noire* is slower and more thoughtful.

SCENE OF THE CRIME

Our dead woman from before is revealed as 21-year-old Antonia Maldonado via two halves of a torn library card: one left in her grasp and one at the end of the trail of clues leading away from the scene of her murder. Her home address is also revealed, so we head to the victim's apartment where we meet landlady Ms. Lapenti.

It's there we learn that Antonia was in the middle of divorce proceedings with her husband, Angel, via an attorney's letter that also contains an address for the husband. Antonia's room, however, appears to have been turned over and ransacked.

Galloway recommends talking to Lapenti. It's our first real taste steering a real interrogation. Once a person tells you something you must decide you want to believe them, not believe them or flat out accuse them of lying. You need to trust your gut, have faith in the evidence and pay close attention to your subjects (see Liar, liar). A subtle smirk or a stumbled sentence could hide a false statement. Due to the ludicrously impressive facial animation, thanks due to *L.A. Noire*'s new MotionScan technology (see Who can?



FADE TO BLACK

Three noir classics to get you on the right track.



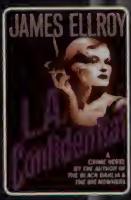
THE MALTESE FALCON

The Maltese Falcon is a 1930 detective novel by Dashiell Hammett. In 1998 the Modern Library ranked it at 56 on its list of the 100 best English-language novels of the 20th Century. The 1941 film adaptation, featuring Humphrey Bogart, is considered a major classic of film noir.



THE BIG SLEEP

The Big Sleep is a 1939 hardboiled crime novel by Raymond Chandler. In 1999 the book was voted one of *Le Monde*'s 100 Books of the Century and in 2005 it was included in *TIME*'s List of the 100 Best Novels. It was adapted into a classic film noir in 1946 starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall.



L.A. CONFIDENTIAL

L.A. Confidential is a 1990 neo-noir novel by James Ellroy. The book is the third in Ellroy's L.A. Quartet series. The critically acclaimed 1997 film adaptation, featuring Guy Pearce and Russell Crowe, is probably your most accessible port of call to get in the mood for *L.A. Noire*. Also, it's in colour. Bonus.



"GOT A MESSAGE FOR YA, PHELPS! *BLAM* I'M SORRY, I CAN'T HEAR YOU. DON'T FIRE THE GUN WHILE YOU'RE TALKING"

MotionScan) in-game conversations are no longer sterile exchanges between stick puppets. It's more than *Mass Effect* in a fedora; it's a game of wits. It's not you against a facsimile of a human, put together by an Identikit committee and animated with vaguely human-like expressions. It's you against a real person.

L.A. Noire will be the debut of this new tech to the world. The development of the game and the tech go hand in hand. MotionScan was necessary to make *L.A. Noire* the game it is today.

"Actually every game I've made has kind of required something that doesn't exist yet," says McNamara. "The idea for the tech came about maybe eight years ago. We wanted to capture people's faces, capture what happens on that outside and on the inside so I started doing some research, even way back when I was at Sony, on that and when I got out here I set up a company as a research project to do that. It was our second or third employee, Oliver Bao, who did all that stuff and he put a team together and somehow they made it work."

"That's the whole things of making games in general," adds Barrera. "A lot of time I say it's like you need to write this paper for school but the word processor doesn't exist so you have to make that first,

and it's the same thing with this game. There was a very strong vision and when Brendan came to us at Rockstar and said, 'I wanna do this game.' To me it fit right in with everything Rockstar's about, which is pushing the medium and doing things that other publishers just aren't gonna do. It was never meant to be *GTA: 1947*; it was always meant to be the evolution of the adventure game."

TOUCH OF EVIL

So was it her estranged husband Angel, sent into a violent rage over their impending divorce? He got into a heated fistfight with us when confronted. Perhaps the bartender at the El Dorado, the bar where Antonia was drinking heavily on the night of her murder, knows more than he's letting on. Or maybe there's something we don't know about Clem, the local fruit store owner and apparently the last person to see Antonia alive.

The evidence we found after our exhaustive investigation and a hectic car chase (where we smashed the suspect's pick-up truck off the road and into a sickening roll) ultimately implicated one of these persons of interest (which we won't spoil) but there were definitely a few questions left unanswered. What is the connection to the Black Dahlia, if any? What repercussions will the results of this case have on any of the following homicide cases? While each resolves itself in an episodic format, players will need to think about *L.A. Noire*'s murder cases as a whole as the homicide desk unfolds.

The nature of the game's cases makes it quite episodic, with each case as easy to consume and as entertaining as the next.

"Bingo. That's it. That's the whole point of it," says Barrera. "I find that with a lot of games, like RPGs you have to dedicate so much consecutive time to it. If you drop off for a week, 'F-k man, what planet was I

UP AND TO THE LEFT? LIAR!

LIAR LIAR!

It's not always foolproof but there really are ways of determining if someone may be lying to you via body language, microexpressions and the words they use.

► Physical expression will be limited and stiff. Any hand, arm and leg movement will usually be towards their own body so the liar takes up less space. They may touch their face, throat and mouth, or scratch their nose or behind their ear. They're not likely to touch their chest with an open hand.

► Someone who is lying to you will usually avoid making eye contact, although they may look at you when they're finished speaking to see if you're buying their bullshit.

► Timing and duration of emotional gestures and emotions may be slightly off normal pace, coming after their associated statements rather than during. The display of emotion is delayed but stays longer it would naturally. Expressions are limited to mouth movements when someone is faking emotions. For example, French physician Guillaume Duchenne discovered there are two distinct types of smiles. A Duchenne smile involves contraction of both the zygomatic major muscle (which raises the corners of the mouth) and the orbicularis oculi muscle (which raises the cheeks and forms crow's feet around the eyes). A non-Duchenne smile involves only the zygomatic major muscle. It's believed that Duchenne smiles indicate genuine spontaneous emotions since most people cannot voluntarily contract the outer portion of the orbicularis oculi muscle.

► A liar might unconsciously place objects, even small ones, between themselves and you. They also may turn their head or body away.

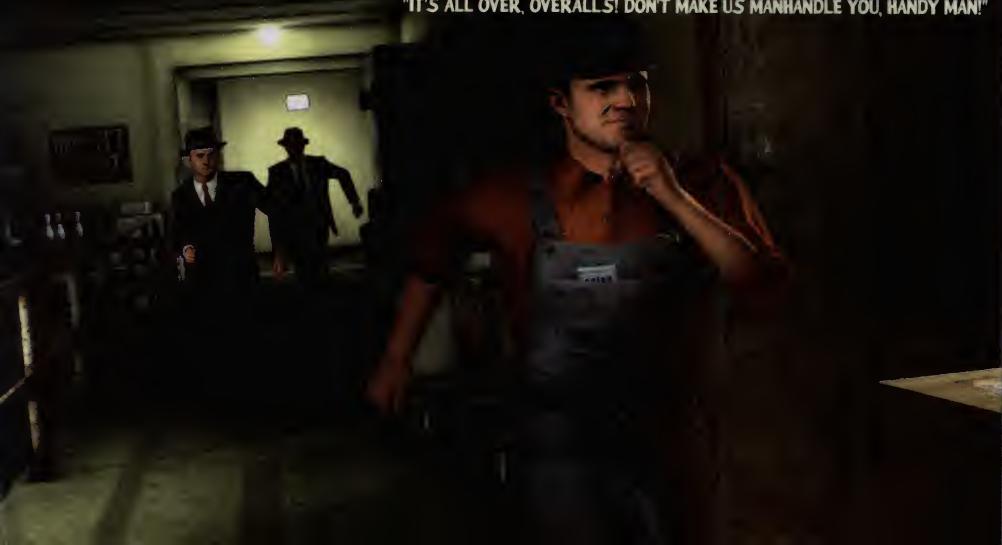
► A liar may repeat your question in their answer and add unnecessary details, as they are not comfortable with pauses in the conversation. They also may leave out pronouns and use fewer contractions.

► Generally, a guilty person gets defensive. An innocent person will often go on the offensive.

► Right-handed people generally look (from your point of view) up and to the right when they're visualising something they remember and up and to the left when they're constructing something in their imagination. The latter can be a sign someone is inventing a lie.

► Microexpressions can reveal lies also. A microexpression is a brief, involuntary facial expression that usually occurs in high-stakes situations. Microexpressions express the seven universal emotions: disgust, anger, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise and contempt. They are very brief in duration, lasting only 1/15 to 1/25 of a second. They're useful to spot because, unlike regular facial expressions, it is difficult to fake microexpressions. Unfortunately most people do not seem to perceive microexpressions in themselves or others. In the Wizards Project, Drs. Paul Ekman and Maureen O'Sullivan studied the ability of people to detect deception. To date, the Wizards Project has identified just over 50 people with this ability after testing nearly 20,000 people. They've dubbed these individuals Truth Wizards.

"IT'S ALL OVER, OVERALLS! DON'T MAKE US MANHANDLE YOU, HANDY MAN!"



WHO CAN? MOTIONSCAN



AUSSIE ACTOR JOHN NOBLE

If you've read any of our previous coverage on *L.A. Noire* you'd know a thing or two about MotionScan – the brilliant new tech powering *L.A. Noire*'s market-leading facial animations. If not, allow us to reiterate just how bafflingly incredible it is.

MotionScan is unlike anything currently in the market and uses 32 High Definition cameras to capture true-to-life three-dimensional performances. Capable of processing up to 20 minutes of facial animation automatically each day MotionScan revolutionises traditional motion-capture and post-production animation. MotionScan records every single emotional detail, mannerism, and facial twitch accurately, frame by frame, as 3D models. No markers or phosphorescent paint needs to be applied to the actors at the time of recording, and no manpower is required to clean up data and animate the finer details by hand after the shoot. Even prosthetics can be captured. Actors can have cuts and bruises applied by a professional makeup artist, for instance, and it'll be perfectly captured by the system.

We haven't been this excited about behind-the-scenes tech like this since NaturalMotion's euphoria game animation engine, used to awesome effect in the likes of *GTA IV* and *Red Dead Redemption*.

The potential for MotionScan is just as grand. Not only will it help build a bridge directly over the uncanny valley, but also hopefully it will elevate the demand for good writing and proper dialogue, regardless of the game. From now on there really is no excuse for the kind of dead-eyed, vacuous planks that recently plagued *Test Drive Unlimited 2*. Developers: you have been warned.



going to? Who am I talking to?" This is more self-contained."

Like a TV show each case has a distinct beginning and end but, like a good TV series, there's a thread running through each one of them. In this instance, that thread is BD – our bloodthirsty lipstick aficionado.

"Since it's based on a lot of real incidents and crimes you almost feel like there's a bit of a documentary quality to it as well and I think that something that game developers never explore really," says Barrera.

"I think once people play the cases and they did some research online and they found out about the real cases I think they'd be pretty amazed about how realistic some of this stuff is," says McNamara.

OUT OF THE PAST

In real life The Black Dahlia was the nickname given to Elizabeth Short by newspapers in the habit of nicknaming crimes they found particularly interesting. Short's much-publicised murder gripped 1947 Los Angeles thanks to the gruesome details. Short's body was found in two pieces, severed at the waist, with her face slashed from the corners of her mouth towards her ears. The killer, who called himself the Black Dahlia Avenger, would later send letters to the Los Angeles Examiner,

taunting the authorities. He was never caught.

How *L.A. Noire* integrates these elements into its own story is unknown, but we've already seen Phelps examining similar letters in game. It also appears Team Bondi may be looking to exploit the theorised connection suggested by some experts between the so-called Lipstick Murders in Chicago and the killing of Elizabeth Short.

Details like this are the beating heart of *L.A. Noire*. The game may be unlike *GTA IV* and *Red Dead Redemption* in a lot of ways, but one thing that most certainly ties them all together is the uncompromisingly high level of detail. It's a trait Rockstar games are known for. McNamara describes the work required to keep authenticity high as "never-ending".

"I think that's on par with what feature films, and major TV series do, because you just wanna be true to that period," he says. "We don't wanna make the game a history lesson but we do like that kind of stuff and it's interesting for the team too, our team especially and the production design team. It gives them a really good point of reference. But yeah, that was their goal, to create this kind of time machine so you could go back and see what is was like."

Barrera agrees.

"Brendan, he's a kindred spirit with us in terms of the nutty amount of research," he adds. "The research that these guys did; it definitely rivals our research departments. It's pretty amazing."

THE ASPHALT JUNGLE

It's not just narrative points either. The richness of *L.A. Noire*'s world is rivalled only by the likes of *GTA IV*. The streets are lined with meticulously crafted and unique shopfronts. The roads themselves are cracked and patched rather than perfect stretches of the same grey texture. Authentic banners and post-war advertising bring colour to the grimy urban maze. *L.A. Noire*'s amazing character models might be Bogarting the limelight but we were never less than highly impressed with the workmanship of *L.A. Noire*'s



"THE SHOTS ARE COMING FROM THE RED LIGHT DISTRICT; WHY WOULD FALCONE'S MEN HOLE UP THERE?"
"SEX, SIR?" "NOT RIGHT NOW, PATROLMAN,"





living world. It's been a lot of extra effort to make it this realistic, but the strength of the pay-off is impossible to ignore.

Barrera begins: "Along with our intensive research loads we have..."

"...an unbelievable amount of legal clearances," continues McNamara. "Off the scale. Spreadsheets up the kazooie for every texture. From everything, from radio shows to cars to advertising to clothes, furniture..."

"Patterns on wallpaper," inserts Barrera. "It's insane."

If, like us, the appeal of not only travelling to a different place – but to a different time – is strong you'll adore *L.A. Noire*. *L.A. Noire* captures that special hook about *Red Dead Redemption* – experiencing a world that no longer exists. It's also why we look so fondly back upon *GTA: Vice City*. The subtle craftsmanship of the eight-square mile world immerses you completely.

SHADOW OF A DOUBT

Subtle too are the organic handholding techniques Team Bondi has employed to ensure you won't get stuck in its sometimes-complex web. Bringing up your notebook and selecting a location of interest will place a waypoint on your minimap, but for the best way to get there you can just press \odot and your partner will give you verbal directions as you cruise around. It

"L.A. NOIRE CAPTURES THAT SPECIAL HOOK ABOUT RED DEAD REDEMPTION - EXPERIENCING A WORLD THAT NO LONGER EXISTS"

feels like the evolution of *The Getaway*'s also-subtle use of a car's indicators to direct you around and it's far less gaudy than a giant floating arrow.

To help you out elsewhere Phelps can accrue and use Intuition Points – a bonus element that take the place of difficulty levels. Like a good detective's innate ability to view the world through a built-in bullshit detector, Intuition Points can be used to assist you within a specific action. Spend one at a crime scene and you'll be able to temporarily reveal all objects of interaction in the area. Spend one during an interrogation and you will remove one of your interrogation options of 'Lie', 'Doubt' or 'Believe'. Suddenly we're Eddie McGuire and the show is called *Who Wants to Avoid The Electric Chair?*

It's important to point out that your success in interrogations can vary. Still, while there's definitely an optimal set of answers that'll yield the "best" responses and evidence, all is not lost if you mishandle a line of questioning. Rather you'll be set

down a different path, chasing other leads.

"There really aren't wrong answers," says Barrera. "I mean, yeah, you can get stuff wrong when you're accusing people but the way that Brendan's written it's definitely, I think, the best example of interactive narrative that there is out there right now, to date."

"You know, you have three choices to pick from and how that takes you on this dialogue rollercoaster ride. Even now, even though I know it back and forth, I'm still finding branches that I was like, 'Man, I haven't seen this since it was recorded!' because it is that deep."

McNamara smiles and agrees.

"Yeah, there's a great one in a homicide case and you can go and interrogate a guy at the police station," he begins. "But most people, when we've watch them play, don't do that. They go and follow the other lead. But the actual guy's performance when he's being accused of murdering his wife in the police station is amazing. Absolutely amazing for something in a videogame, but 50 per cent of the audience will probably never see it."

As such, replayability is king. There's no multiplayer component of *L.A. Noire* because, like a great many other great games this generation (including *Mass Effect 2*, *God of War III*, *Heavy Rain*, ▶

London to L.A.

L.A. Noire is nothing if not a game of vast detail in every department – but it's not without precedent. *The Getaway* for PS2, McNamara's last game, was similarly stacked with real-world details.



REAL CARS

The Getaway was, and still is, notable for its use of licensed vehicles in an open-world game. The result is a far less jarring experience; it's no good being inside a real city if you're jolted back into fantasy each time you get behind the wheel of an almost-an-Audi or a not-a-Nissan. Fans of '40s land whales will recognise Cole's Cadillac Series 62, and the rest of the game's rides, and be thankful Team Bondi didn't settle on a bunch of generic-looking olde-style vintage vehicles.



REAL BRANDS

If you think of an in-game city like a massive movie set, it makes sense to dress it in proper, real-world detail if you want people to buy into what they're seeing. *The Getaway*'s use of real-world stores, like McDonalds, EB Games, Borders and many more made London feel like the real London. Similarly, *L.A. Noire* follows *The Getaway*'s lead. Not only will you spot the Hollywoodland sign in the background, you'll spot real movie theatres, real hotels (like the Mayflower) and a ridiculous amount of incidental detail only 80-year-old Los Angeles natives will recognise.



OLD IRISH COP DITTY: 'YA RESISTED ARREST AN' CALLED ME FAT, I KNOCKED YA DOWN AND SHAT IN YER HAT.'



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, *Fallout 3* and *Batman: Arkham Asylum* it's a game geared entirely for a single-player experience. Squeezing in a generic multiplayer mode would've been a misuse of Team Bondi's time and development budget.

Like *Mass Effect 2*, however, Team Bondi and Rockstar can see gamers trading advice and insight to each other on the different ways they got through the game's extensive list of cases.

"We've been playing it for a number of years now and there are still little bits that jump out at you that you haven't seen," says McNamara.

"Yeah, I mean, when we were prepping for you guys to do the hands-on I recommended the case that you guys played," says Barrera. "I remember it was one of our PR guys was like, 'Why would we wanna show that one? It's completely linear.' And I'm like, 'Are you f---ing kidding me? It's got nine branches to it!' If you start to think about it and play it a different way it completely opens up."



"There's definitely been a lot of that, 'Hey, I didn't play it anything like that,'" says McNamara. "And that was a goal at the start. There's definitely a bunch of ways through different cases and lots of different ways to get to end results."

"I'm constantly trying to break it," Barrera jokes.

"Yeah, and that's one of the things in testing it, because of the logic bombs involved in all this stuff is horrendous," says McNamara with a wry grin. "Did I find this, did I find that? Who did I speak to? I only asked him that question; testing it is crazy."



SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

Crucially, despite a significant focus on never-before-seen tech and compelling interactive storytelling, Team Bondi has still got the fundamentals right. Phelps' on-foot controls satisfy; he moves with natural smoothness and runs with a great sense of weight. The controls aren't unlike Rockstar's other third-person titles and are typically high quality.



"I WON'T REST ONE MINUTE UNTIL WHOEVER DID THIS IS BEHIND BARS. NOW, LET'S GRAB A BITE TO EAT."

"DESPITE A SIGNIFICANT FOCUS ON NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN TECH, TEAM BONDI HAS STILL GOT THE FUNDAMENTALS RIGHT"

Behind the wheel the news is also good. The vehicles we drove seemed to translate the feeling of a heavy car on thin tyres well. Both low-speed handling and high-speed handling feel believable, without any of that arcade-like shallowness that tends to make driving feel too twitchy and superficial. Go lights-and-sirens and traffic will peel out of the way. Mount the footpath and lampposts and fire hydrants will crumble before your bumper.

The result is a game that feels as good as it looks, which is all you can ask for. It's clear Team Bondi and Rockstar are focussed on nothing less than a triple-A end product.

"We're trying to push the medium," says Barrera. "You know, we're all enthusiasts here and we know that this medium is an art form and we know that we can create amazing experiences for people. It's just that we need to now take it to that next level and I think we're doing that with this game."

"In a kind of dumb way you could imagine sitting there and playing this game and showing your mum and she wouldn't think it was stupid, right?" suggests McNamara. "Nine out of 10 times she'd just be kind of going, 'What are you blowing up?'

"Oprah Winfrey," he continues, plucking a name from thin air. "She could do one of those interrogations and probably have some idea whether she thought the person was right or wrong. The opportunity is to try and bring along the people who have supported Rockstar for over 10 years now and make that audience bigger."

L.A. Noire launches on May 17. Buy yourself a nice hat in the meantime. 

FILL YOUR HANDS

If you thought Call of Duty dominated the shooter landscape, think again. 2011 has gamers looking down the barrel of more than a dozen first-person titles where the means to the end isn't just how fast you can pull the trigger. Over the next 16 pages we've wrapped up just what to expect in some of the biggest, brashest and boldest shooters coming out. Get locked and loaded.



Expected Release: Late 2011
Developer: DICE
Players: 1-24

BATTLEFIELD 3

You'll want to play this if you want to bring the house down - literally

The console world has only really experienced the *Battlefield* franchise in derivative form. Whether it was the somewhat watered down and rebranded *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* on the PlayStation 2 or the *Battlefield: Bad Company* games, the experience was different to what fans of the once PC-exclusive franchise were used to. Sure, the class-based multiplayer and emphasis on infantry combat mixed with vehicular mayhem made the transition with the brand name, but there wasn't much else that emigrated with it. With *Battlefield 3*, EA Digital Illusions CE (or 'DICE' for short) has taken what it learnt from its derivative multiplatform titles and applied it to the core *Battlefield* formula for one hell of an explosive cocktail.

Thus far

A quick *Battlefield* history lesson is in order. For DICE, the first-person shooter meets vehicular combat approach of its popular contemporary warfare series was spawned in the trenches of World War I and under a different title. *Codename Eagle* was the beginning of the oft copied 'Battlefield formula', but it wasn't until DICE's release of *Battlefield 1942*, a World War II-themed shooter, that audiences really started to take notice. After a couple of expansion packs, DICE shifted the chronology steadily forward with *Battlefield: Vietnam*, *Battlefield 2* and then the futuristic, but still somewhat derivative, *Battlefield 2142*. So although *Battlefield 3* is technically the fifth core franchise outing, this is the DICE logic.

The importance of physicality

When Karl Magnus Troedsson, general manager at DICE, walked onto the stage at GDC in San Francisco, he didn't waste time with meaningless preamble. "DICE stands on three core values that we like to bring up whenever we can: quality, innovation and fun... or joy. Whatever you want to call it."

Whether you're dropping down a hole and watching your character realistically break his fall or being thrown by the shockwave of an RPG round that was a little too close for comfort, *Battlefield 3* wants you to be immersed on many levels. Patrick Söderlund, CEO of DICE, emphasised the importance of physicality in *Battlefield 3*. "I think that physicality is the major thing for the game; we want you to feel like that you go up against the wall, you can touch the wall. We want you to be able to touch other players and things like that."

But this emphasis was only the beginning of player immersion in regards to having a palpable feel for your digital presence.

Anyone familiar with some of the core EA Sports titles such as more-recent *FIFA* titles will be aware that the animation system is impressively realistic. This same lifelike animation technology, referred to as 'ANT', will be present in a first-person shooter for the first time in *Battlefield 3*. Says Söderlund, "Years ago we contacted EA and said 'Hey, we'd like to take your tech and make it first-person and put it into a shooter game.' And they were very supportive, but it's taken us quite a while to



His future's so bright he's gotta wear shades

get the result that we wanted." Throughout the course of the live gameplay demo, we saw the results of their efforts. While not without occasional clipping issues, the smooth and realistic movement between player stances or the way that character's legs would actually believably reposition when rounding corners (instead of skidding stiff-legged on the spot) was refreshingly realistic.

Bring the house down

What would a post-*Bad Company* game in the *Battlefield* series be if it didn't incorporate destructibility? Frostbite 2.0, the latest version of the engine that powers the *Battlefield* series, takes destructibility to a whole new level. While macro levels of destruction will be familiar to anyone that brought down a building in *Bad Company 2*, *Battlefield 3* is also emphasising a "micro" level of destruction that allows players to do more localised damage. Söderlund highlighted this in his explanation: "You can take down the sides of buildings, you can shoot down signs, you can shoot building windows; everything can be destroyed, both on a micro and macro level, which I think is cool. So you can destroy a window or shoot part of a window, then you can blow up the whole building."

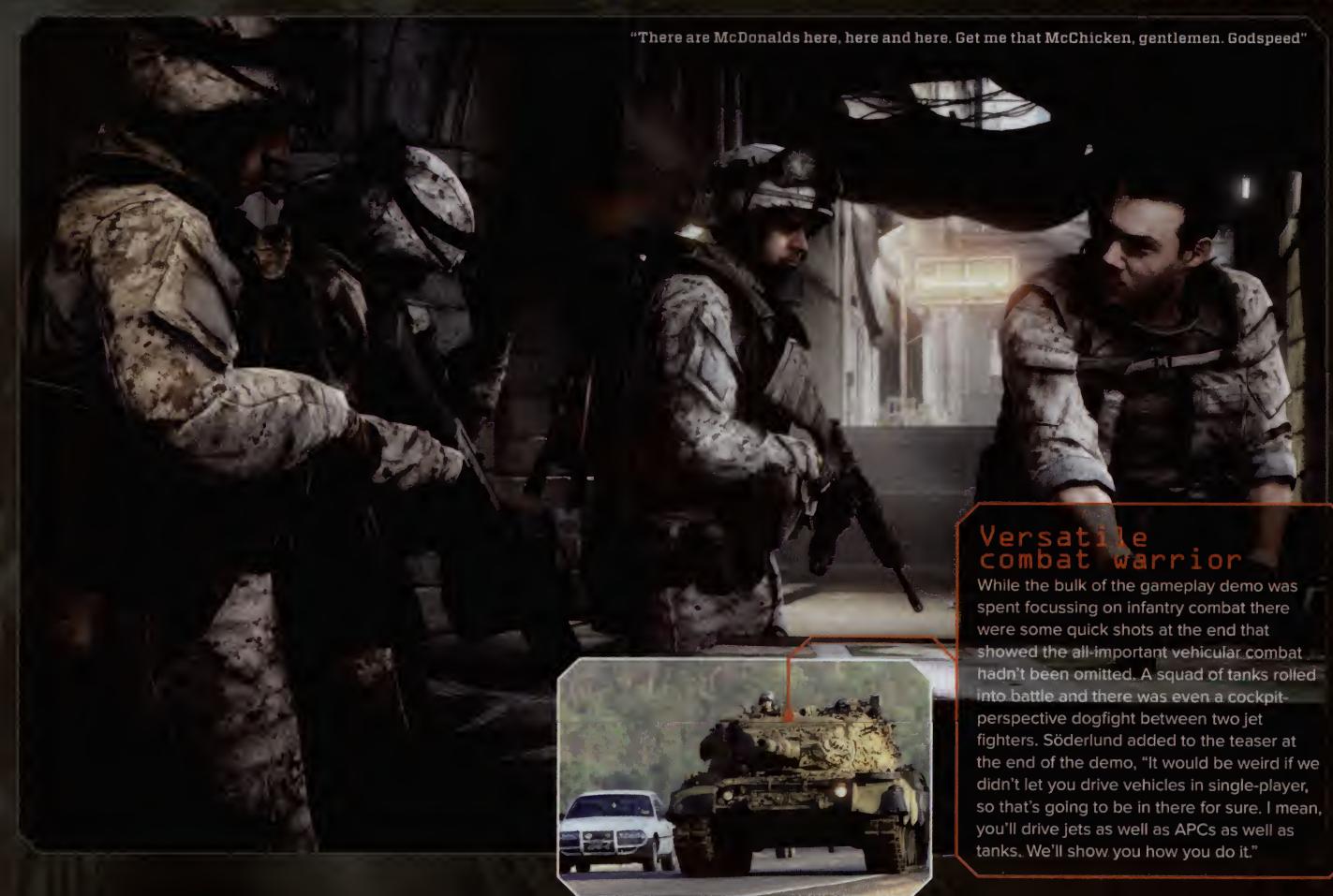
We witnessed the shattering of a pot plant by a wide sniper shot, the clipping away of concrete cover by concentrated machinegun fire and the damage that bullets do to softer targets such as wood and thin sheets of corrugated iron. But that's only the micro levels of destruction in *Battlefield 3*. On the macro end of the spectrum, we saw the entire side of a hotel ripped open by a well-placed rocket that



No stairway. Denied



"There are McDonalds here, here and here. Get me that McChicken, gentlemen. Godspeed"



Versatile combat warrior

While the bulk of the gameplay demo was spent focussing on infantry combat there were some quick shots at the end that showed the all-important vehicular combat hadn't been omitted. A squad of tanks rolled into battle and there was even a cockpit perspective dogfight between two jet fighters. Söderlund added to the teaser at the end of the demo, "It would be weird if we didn't let you drive vehicles in single-player, so that's going to be in there for sure. I mean, you'll drive jets as well as APCs as well as tanks. We'll show you how you do it."



"Wait you guys: I fell on my keys!"



also resulted in the hotel sign falling out of place and dangling precariously from the few holdings that were still connected.

Nature's fury

At the conclusion of the demo, nature proved to be the third winning faction in a firefight between the U.S. Marines and PLR foes as an earthquake ripped through the city battlefield, violently negotiating the cessation of human hostilities. The protagonist, Sergeant Black, was thrown on his back as the Frostbite 2.0 engine demonstrated how it can handle nature's fury by way of crumbling terrain, as well as the shaking, cracking and eventual tumbling of a building towards the stunned soldier. It was like watching the effects of some crazy lovemaking between *Black Hawk Down* and *2012*, and it left us wanting a whole lot more.

DICE is willing to learn from what it's done wrong and what it's done right in the past.

"We've actually learned a bunch from *Mirror's Edge* on what works and doesn't work in first-person," says Söderlund. "Some things worked well in *Mirror's Edge* and some things went

not so good, but the things that worked, we've actually taken and focussed on in *Battlefield 3*." While this refers more to the aforementioned emphasis on physicality, it was clear that the spinoff *Bad Company* series has also influenced this next core *Battlefield* title.

Söderlund admitted that *Kelly's Heroes* was the influence for the original *Bad Company*, but the *Battlefield* spinoff's emphasis on believable characters and the importance of a campaign experience has also carried over to *Battlefield 3*. Where the PC-exclusive *Battlefield* titles were multiplayer-only with a single-player bot match component, *Battlefield 3* is set to have a big emphasis on the single-player experience. But while *Bad Company* used the semi-light-hearted *Kelly's Heroes* (watch it: it's *Three Kings* with Nazis and Clint Eastwood) for inspiration, *Battlefield 3* is looking for a grittier 'war is hell' approach, and has employed the novel/HBO series *Generation Kill* as its muse.

Realism emphasised

ANT animation technology, believable destructibility and first-person shooter



Battlefield: Fight Night

At one point during the demo Black was tasked with following a wire into a dingy basement that led to a suspicious silver box. After pulling the first of two wires out, Black is spun around by an enemy that tries to lay him out with a mean right hook. The game breaks off into a semi-interactive cut-scene as Black and his attacker exchange brutal blows; all the while the silver box is beeping a reminder that it requires immediate attention. Black eventually gains the upper hand, pushing the PLR fighter up against a chain-link fence, introducing the back of his head to a none-too-soft surface before lunging at the final wire to defuse the bomb in the nick of time.

physicality kick-start the believability engine in *Battlefield 3*; but the chassis is comprised of great voice acting, fitting dialogue and an immersive soundscape. From casual banter in an APC en route to its destination, switching between random topics of conversation when moving from point to point and screaming out orders when thrown into the thick of it, our time with *Battlefield 3* was dripping with personality. Couple this with a city aural-sphere that speaks its own dialogue by way of a believable cacophony of everyday sounds mixed with the ever-present threat of violence, and we were a military-issued pair of boots shy of being right there with the onscreen U.S. Marines.

The live gameplay demo was broken into three sections, the first of which started with an



"Candygram for Mr. Mongo!"



Never interrupt this guy in the middle of a combat jack

introduction to the tone, squad and game world. It ended with an ambush in a parking lot, set off by one of your teammates being knocked on his arse by a surprise shot. After dragging him to cover, Black was outside with his other squad members, taking down the dozens of enemies that poured into the area. The AI was none too bright though. "We don't have the best AI, technically, in the world," says Söderlund. "I couldn't care about that to be honest. It's great, but I want to focus on the overall experience of what the AI is." This section of the demo ended with Black flat on his back after a too-close-for-comfort rocket hit a car he was using for cover.

Anti-sniper school 101

The level jumped forward in its chronology and it was up to the team to take care of a sniper positioned high up in a hotel window. On the top of the building opposite the hotel, the Marines had to move from cover to cover in a variety of stances, before ultimately being forced to prostrate themselves and shimmy to a spot where they could get a bead on the 50-calibre-toting foe. All the while, stray rounds whizzed over their heads, or tore up chunks of concrete

when the now-panicked shots sounded out a staccato of potential death. Sniper Sam met his demise at the hands of a well-placed rocket from Black, while the squad was laying down covering fire. After the dust settled, it was clear that this group of Marines was well versed in the art of death dealing as a cohesive unit.

The final section of gameplay involved an intense PLR attack along a stretch of road. As the Marines sprinted to get into the best defensible position, friendly attack choppers screamed in overhead, laying down a wall of ordnance. Taking guard on a raised pedestrian walkway, Black picks up a fallen heavy machinegun and begins raining accurate fire on the PLR troops pouring in from the top of the street. Shooting enough rounds into the many abandoned cars converts enemy cover into a PLR barbecue, while their often accurate return fire converted lighter cover into Swiss cheese, knocking Black on his back again at certain points.

Even though we gleaned a lot from our time with *Battlefield 3*, it felt as though it was all over too quickly. We'll keep you updated on further reports as DICE releases us information but, delays notwithstanding, we'll all be playing this genre-evolving game before the year is out.

Multiplayer tidbits

DICE was very secretive about the multiplayer portion of *Battlefield 3*; suffice it to say that it's going to be a big part of the game. We managed to get the following scraps of multiplayer information out of Söderlund during our interview. "We've got 24 players and, arguably, we think that the most fun you can have in multiplayer is when it's between 32 and 40 players. We've done substantial research into this. On console it's actually technically constrained to some extent in terms of maximum players, but we still think that we can have 24 and they'll still have a great experience."



Expected Release: May 20
Developer: Splash Damage
Players: 1-16

BRINK

You'll want to play this if you like shooters that keep you on the move



Tattoo you

Your character is completely customisable, right down to their voice. We've seen this kind of stuff before, but not often in a shooter. There are exhaustive options for every part of the body and, at any point during creation, you can see what your character would look like for either Security or Resistance. All tattoos are permanent too, so choose wisely!

Splash Damage's new take on first-person shooters is about to deliver a parkour-fuelled scissor kick to the competition, slide into cover, drop a turret, disguise itself, stab you in the back and blow the hinges off the whole genre. It's going to have other developers cower in disbelief at the dawn of such a unifying concept.

The premise is key. It's 2045 and the world is a dreary place. The melting of polar icecaps and other blows to mother Earth led to rising water levels. An Eco-friendly experiment known as The Ark is humanity's last hope, but it's on the brink of civil war. Choosing to play out your campaign as a member of the Resistance fighting for survival, or Security fighting to maintain law and order, whilst protecting The Ark's resources gives you two different perspectives to work through. However, things are never as simple as they seem.

A hundred miles and runnin'

What makes *Brink* such a standout idea is the triple pronged attack to the genre it brings with it. There's the SMART (Smooth Movement Across Random Terrain) technology that makes you as agile and sprightly as you want to be, opening up all new ways to traverse and scale. You have intelligent

AI as both back up and adversaries, plus a diverse mission wheel that gives out any number of class-based objectives. The focus here is on teamwork. The third prong is the drop in/drop out gameplay that truly blurs the lines and redefines what you consider single- and multiplayer. Wrap that around diverging campaigns and it's not hard to see the appeal.

Between rounds we spoke to Creative Director Richard Ham and got the lowdown on the philosophy behind *Brink*'s storyline.

"*Brink* will have 16 missions, spread across the two campaigns but out of those 16, four are what we like to call the 'what if?' missions. As Security, at one point the Resistance will try to destroy Founder's Tower [the iconic tower from all gameplay trailers], and you're the only thing that can stop that from happening. But when you play through as the Resistance, you'll notice that the mission isn't there. The idea behind it is, what if the Resistance had been pushed to breaking point? We're not trying to preach, but we want players to take a step back and think, 'Well, that only happened because I thought I was doing the right thing as Security, but in reality I helped create this situation.' So ultimately who is responsible?" It's a more than interesting idea and not the only trick *Brink* has up its sleeve.

Band Aids: manly



How to know you're overdressed #14: You're the only one in a gasmask



Déjà vu

Brink's been demoed a lot over the last 12 months and we revisited the level called Container City. It involved escorting an engineering drone to make its way to a specific container and bust it wide open so we could steal a vial of biological matter inside and exit post haste. We've covered this map in a previous hands-on and, recalling some hints and tricks relayed to us at the time by Splash Damage's enthusiastic CEO Paul Wedgwood, we were able to carve up the opposition. Like all good multiplayer shooters it's clear *Brink* will reward players with the patience to become extremely intimate with the maps.

The French connection

One thing you'll notice almost immediately is the distinct visuals that *Brink* has wrapped around it. There's no confusing it for any other game. That is in no small part to the acquisition of art director Olivier Leonardi. Shifting the entire creative team's focus from hyperrealism to exaggerated cartoon style was no mean feat, but he had a vision and pushed to make it a reality. From the morphed facial features to the steroid infused physiques, the bold and uniquely fashionable clothing all has an unmistakable French lean to it, as does the vibrant colour palette. As Leonardi said, "We're bringing colour back into shooters."



After easing ourselves back into the SMART system, we geared up for the next stage – Security Tower (or Sec-Tow for short). This was a more elaborate map and involved the liberation from incarceration of a comrade for the Resistance. Once you pop him from his cell, you need to make sure he escapes in one piece as you defend him from the Security onslaught. This was a much more layered map, providing ample opportunities for a quick clambor across flights of stairs, along gangways and allowed many drop down, surprise headshot moments for our itchy trigger fingers, but we wanted to try something a little different. Ham talked us through a class that has been overlooked so far: the Operative.

Operator please

While the rest of the team were involved in a fierce fire-fight with Security as they moved along at an achingly slow pace with the freed prisoner (not their fault, the guy crawls at a snail's pace), we hit a command station, changed our class to Operative, loaded up a silenced machine gun and a single pistol and hit the objective wheel to see where we could help out the most.

"The Operative differs from the other classes as he moves as a lone wolf," says Ham. "In a game like *Brink*, where we really focus on ways



Say hello to his mini friend



Enemy Territory

Splash Damage's mantra and concentration on fashioning the best single- and multiplayer experience stems right back to CEO Paul Wedgwood's competitive online nature. As part of one of the oldest Quake clans (Clan Earth-Quakers) he spent a great deal of time honing his skills and worked on mods for the game itself. Approached by Activision, he and his mates worked on some maps for *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*, which in turn led to *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars* and now their first original IP, *Brink*. Like many devs, the team just want to make the type of games they'd like to play themselves.

for guys to play together and stick together, the Operative is there for the guys that think, 'I just want to get away from all you people, you're crowding me.' The idea is to infiltrate, decimate and destroy by disguising as the enemy, disorienting and breeding distrust, making them wonder if that guy approaching is a team-mate or not. Wicked concept.

Ham reiterated, "The Operative is pretty much trying to screw with the enemy. That's his job." Yet, while the Operative works solo, his actions will invariably help his team.

We're up to the task. We disguise ourselves and switch to a secondary weapon and moseyed on about with an evil knife/pistol combo and maintained the illusion as long as we didn't shoot. We backstabbed our way through to the front lines, leaving a graveyard's worth of Security in our wake. It's hugely satisfying, although we haven't experienced being on the other end of it yet. Ham then showed us another dirty trick to add to our arsenal: caitrops.

Beverly Hills ninja

Caitrops are those messed up little ninja star things that get thrown on the ground. They're designed to stop cars so they're more than capable of being embedded into an unsuspecting fool's feet.

"It creates this sea of spikes for about 30 seconds or so," said Ham, "with a situation

where the enemy can still run straight through and end up like John McClane barefoot in *Die Hard*. It will hurt, quite a bit, or they can slow walk through without taking any damage, but in doing so, they're pretty much a sitting duck. I think it's really clever." After setting us a few sneaky drops around corners and such, we sat back and took pot shots at anyone silly enough to bound through, and make them pay.

We had another run at Sec-Tow and we did so with a fully levelled up character against similarly high level enemy forces, which gave us another sweet perk to play with (see You the bomb, baby). It's a game with a lot to give; we were as entertained at the conclusion of our hands-on session as we were at the beginning. The focus on team tactics is particularly appealing to us, adding much-appreciated depth to an often shallow experience.

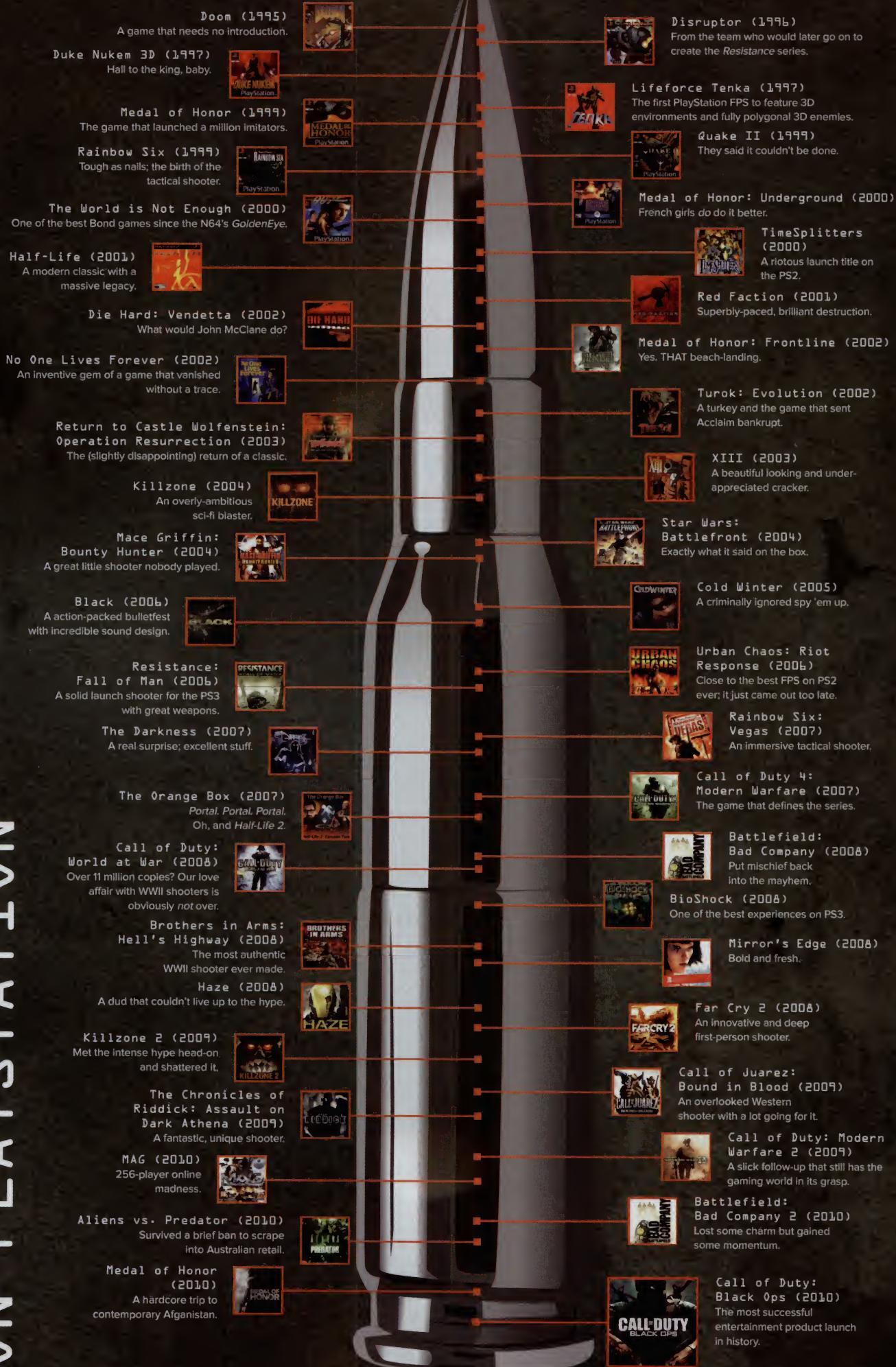
It's perhaps fitting that *Brink* takes place on a flooded Earth. It's certainly entering an equally flooded marketplace, filled to the gills with rival shooters. *Brink*'s breakneck pace and delicate balance of classes and perks does well to distinguish it from the pack, however.

It's an understatement to say *Brink* is engrossing. We've seen it multiple times over the last year or so and it feels so complete. We can only see polish being applied to it before the game drops in mid-May. Prepare to be impressed when it lands.

You the bomb, baby!

One of the top tier perks you unlock as Operative is called Cortex Bomb and it really is a nasty little 'screw you'. When an Operative is downed and waiting for the respawn clock to click over, or biding time while a medic is on route, take this tip to dissuade the perp that shot you from revelling in the moment. As he's pumping your corpse full of lead, teabagging your face and other such childish nonsense make him pay by triggering the perk. A thumbstick click is all it takes and, before you know it, you're both sailing sky high and littering the map with the remains of both your corpses. Suck it!

A HISTORY OF FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS ON PLAYSTATION



Expected Release: April 21
Developer: Codemasters
Players: 1-4

OPERATION FLASHPOINT: RED RIVER

You'll want to play this if you want intelligent co-op



"Dude, spider on your arse—s'cool, I'll get it" [click]

Harder than a box of diamonds crafted by Charles Bronson. That accurately describes the previous *Operation Flashpoint* title, *Dragon Rising*. It was hard. Well hard. It favoured military precision over fun, barking directions and codes at you while you trekked across the countryside trying not to get shot in the head by an enemy you didn't even know was there. We bet most of you never played it.

Red River, however, is more like a box of diamonds crafted by Mr. T. It's still hard, but it's much more appealing with a surprisingly tongue-in-cheek attitude. Sion Lenton, creative director on *Red River* told us he doesn't want this to be a mil-sim like *Dragon Rising*. It still has a distinct *Operation Flashpoint* feel about it in that you need to plan your next move carefully, but now "gameplay, location and tone... are the three things we've really worked on," continues Lenton, and he's the first to admit that *Dragon Rising* was a bit 'dry'. *Red River*'s different, and Lenton pitches it as "authentically cool".

We're playing a mission from *Red River*'s campaign in four-player co-op, in what's going to be the best and intended way. We're part of Fireteam Bravo which itself is one part of a three-team squad led by the enigmatic Sergeant Knox. Knox isn't a playable character but rather drives part of the narrative as you trek across you've-probably-never-heard-of-it Tajikistan,

an area that borders China, Afghanistan and Pakistan. We doubt you'll go there for a holiday.

The backstory. It's the year 2013, and American forces have pushed insurgents out of Afghanistan and squeezed them into Tajikistan, following them through to finally eradicate this hostile threat. Then China comes in from the East and there's a clash of superpowers over Tajikistan. "The reason it's about the big boys is because they get the best toys," he said wryly, referring to the tanks, choppers and firepower in the game.

Our mission begins with Bravo touching down in a chopper, tasked with protecting a convoy of trucks as they make their way

across the winding Tajikistan roads towards a crumbling dam. Alpha and Charlie, the other two Fireteams in our squad that are controlled by the AI will sometimes cross over and weave into our play area, but otherwise they're just out of our sight doing their own thing. Their chatter adds to the narrative experience. They meet antagonising forces and shout banter over the radio. It's all useful stuff though and it contributes to the atmosphere.

What really makes the game stand out above its peers is the focus on and flexibility of the co-op. With three other humans we were completely engrossed in the mission, and

Like a cucumber

The shift to 'authentically cool' came from Lenton and his team looking at what didn't work in *Dragon Rising* and how they were going to improve that. It meant taking influence from movies and shows such as *The Hurt Locker*, *Restrepo* and *Generation Kill*. "It's a world apart from us, what these guys have to do for their job, they're just kind of normal guys that have to do an incredible thing and it's that tone that we wanted to bring to the game."

"When you see raw footage of these guys in action it looks and sounds nothing like the

movies, it was that kind of lifestyle that we wanted to bring across to *Red River* rather than the cigar chomping, great hero SAS hero who throws himself on top of a nuclear bomb and saves the world scenario. [Instead] these guys are entrenched in position for months, not actually seeing the enemy, just firing on their position and knowing that the enemy's there, and that they've confirmed a kill when the firing stops. You never see anyone firing at them; you just see the tracer fire. We thought that was fascinating and wondered how we could capture that atmosphere."



Weapons of mass degradation

You can't question Codemaster's quest for authenticity. We arrived into the presentation room to find a collection of heavy duty firepower on the desks. An MP5, a RPG, AK47, and a semi-automatic with an underslung grenade launcher. The team had been out to firing ranges to see what they felt like and sounded like to fire, and it was surprising to see just how heavy they were.

In game, the weapons are worn and bear the brunt of a long and hard life. Codies found that soldiers out in the field patch up their gear as they go, securing sights with tape and rubber bands. Fireteam Bravo are guys that have taken the fight from Afghanistan to Tajikistan so their weapons have gone with them, and along with their battered uniforms they've patched up their gear with gaffer tape. "We couldn't have done this in a dry simulation," says Lenton.



"No sir, I'm not sure where the red river is. No sir, I imagine it's just a clever name."



found that with a little bit of nous we took the enemy troops apart effectively. Dying in a stage meant we had the chance to switch

classes to scout, rifleman, auto rifleman or grenadier – each with its own strengths and weaknesses and different weapon loadouts.

Refreshingly, there's no competitive multiplayer, only co-op based events. It's not a bad thing. One that we played was a tower defence stage where waves of enemies relentlessly streamed towards our base, and between each wave we could tool up and prepare ourselves for the next onslaught. In campaign mode you can have people drop in and drop out of your game, and vice versa.

Tajikistan's a fairly barren place with varied topography, pocketed with villages and patchy infrastructure. As our campaign mission progressed we were either running towards the dam or hitching a lift on the convoy after clearing out hostile areas. Cutting to the map screen we zoom right out, and can see it's going to offer an impressive amount of area to play across. Intriguingly, part of gameworld has been sectioned off purely for the co-operative multiplayer modes, but the scope of the area in the main campaign is still enormous.

The narrative in the main campaign has been planned out meticulously and the game is divided into three 'acts'. While the story ebbs and flows accordingly, the way the stages are lit matches the pacing.

"We want to be able to take a screenshot from any level and be able to tell which mission it was because of the way the lighting changes," explains

Lenton. "So it's quite dark in act two, really rich earthy tones and so on."

One of the newest elements of mechanics to the series is a system of 'perks' and experience points, used to level your character up in order to use different attachments and weapons. Plus, you can upgrade your character class with, say, unlimited bandages and medical packs, extra ammo, armor piercing rounds or faster reload times.

This system initially seems to completely contradict what other *Flashpoint* games have done in the past. However, it works and it makes the game more fun. Not a bad thing for a game to be. You're not going to turn into some kind of Superman though – a well-placed bullet will still kill you, and you're going to have to work reasonably hard to earn such privileges. Getting shot in the gut will ruin your day pretty quickly if you don't patch it up, and having a bullet in your leg will slow you down.

Similarly, you can pick up an AK47 off the ground, but if you're not familiar with a weapon it's likely to jam. "It's like when you jump into a car you haven't driven before in *GT5*," says Lenton. "It'll take you a while to get used to it, and it's this analogy I like to put to the weapons in *Red River*. They have handling parameters, so you have to master them [to get the most out of them]."

Less radical are the smaller refinements, such as the command circles that are now only two layers deep rather than three. Issuing frequently used commands has been streamlined, so if you do play solo with three AI characters you're not going to be in a fit of rage just getting them to notice something important, or holding their position.

Red River feels like the series has had a minor overhaul and we're gagging to play more co-op, if only to explore the rolling incentives like perks. Thinking about it there hasn't been a game since *Borderlands* that we could play the story from start to finish with a friend.

"I don't want to play against 13-year-olds who are shouting abuse about my mother down the headset," says Lenton. "Not having [competitive multiplayer in *Red River*] is no great loss, and there are other games that will fill that requirement – if that's what you want then buy that game. If it's massively multiplayer online game you want then buy that. If it's a shit-hot co-op experience with an authentic, engaging set-up then buy *Red River*."

Rule of 10

So, we know about co-op, we know about the system of perks. But what about something that no-one else knows? "I'll tell you my favourite secret," says Lenton, mysteriously. "Rule number three. Knox has his 10 rules, and you'll see them on the loading screen, on the instruction manual and so on, but if you gather them all together you'll see that rule number three is missing. You don't find out what it is until the very end."

Expected Release: August 25
Developer: Eidos Montreal
Players: 1

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

You'll want to play this if you want a thinking man's shooter



Multiplicity

You'll want to think carefully about how you play out your conversations and act in combat. Act like a total prick and you might just end up alienating people who could guide you through a section with little fuss. Act like a freakin' pansy and you won't crack the hard bastards who need a little coercion to get things just how you need them. All the decisions you make will minutely alter the ending.

Of course, this encourages multiple playthroughs, especially when you realise that there's no way you can upgrade every single one of Jensen's augmentations. If you want him to be a silent, invisible goatee ninja you're best off sticking to that path. Likewise, if you want to make your gun the tool that gets you from A to B then focus on eye upgrades that will improve accuracy and reduce recoil.



In the future, there will be vests

Along with Nathan Drake, Haggard and Solid Snake, Adam Jensen – the star of *Human Revolution* – is one dude we'd like to have a beer with. It's his sense of justice and casual cool that sits well with us. Plus he'd had to have a bottle opener tucked somewhere amongst his diverse collection of blades and guns.

He's also part of a world with more layers than an onion gobstopper. Chicago 2027 is the birthplace of human augmentation. Jensen's a bodyguard who works for Sarif Industries and is ex-SWAT, so he knows how to handle himself in a firefight. His boss is the enigmatic David Sarif, a man who wants to better humans by unlocking the secrets held in their DNA. There's also a hefty contract involved with the military as well; the Typhoon, a weapon that sprays balls of steel out in a vicious radius. Sarif himself has a prosthetic arm, a patchwork of black metal panels.

We're walking through Sarif Industries, still fully human at this stage as another character and love interest, Megan Reed, takes us through the offices. The game begins in a *Half-Life 2*-like on-rails section. Sarif Industries is a bustling place that looks out on the tops of Chicago's skyscrapers, and the incidental details are part of an intricate tapestry that account for a bulk of the game's charm.

Researchers hurry around the labs, people are having conversations in the corridors, and through one lab window we see a man running on a treadmill, his stride matched perfectly by a pair of disembodied legs running next to him. It's simultaneously easy to wax on about the small details but hard to take them all in.

It doesn't take long for things to go pear shaped at Sarif Industries. There's been an invasion by persons unknown, and Sarif sends Jensen down to take care of it. Offices are on fire, bodies are slumped against walls and one

scientist, begging for his life, is gunned down by a behemoth of a man who casually walks on with murderous intent. It's the only part of the game that's a 'straight shooter', and after a horrific ending to this section where Adam is left for dead is he literally rebuilt by his employer.

Cut forward six months and Jensen's once again working for Sarif, but packing more metal in his frame than the Terminator. On his way to meet David, Jensen runs into the prickly tech specialist Pritchard, and the two engage in an obviously terse conversation – Pritchard's unimpressed with Jensen's performance as SWAT and has a healthy ego that doesn't stop him from voicing his opinion. How you handle this dialogue depends on how you want to play the game, and it's reminiscent of *Mass Effect*'s dialogue circle; one of the biggest elements of the *Deus Ex* universe is social interactions. The conversations you have with people (and who you help out) affect your relationships further on in the game, and there are minute tweaks to the game's ending according to how you treat others.

Unlike *Mass Effect*, though, you're not lumped into a character class. Rather you're stepping into someone's shoes but choosing where they step. Jensen has a whole range of augmentations that can be bought and used depending on how you want to play. We had access to the full range for the purposes of our demo, and if you've played a *Deus Ex* title in the past you'll be pretty familiar with the most of augs on offer. Run faster, run silently, pick up heavy objects, security hacks, fall further, etc. One extremely useful new aug is the ability to view an enemy's cone of vision, *Metal Gear Solid*-style.

After our conversation with Pritchard we hear about a break in at one of Sarif's factories. A radical terrorist group, Purity First, has hold of the Typhoon and they've taken hostages. Security

forces are waiting for Jensen to go in before they storm the place, but as Sarif's a business man his primary concern is recovering the weapon – hostages are a secondary concern.

In the chopper on the way over a conversation with Sarif lets us choose how we're going to handle things: do we prefer dealing with threats up close or from far away, do we want to go in silently or prepared to make things loud and bloody? Depending on what choice you make here you'll either be given a taser, a tranquilliser gun, a pistol, sniper rifle or, in our case, a semi-automatic rifle.

Square Enix reps told us there's also between two to five different ways through a level. Impressively, it's possible to play the game and not kill any regular free-roaming enemies, though there are some boss fights where you will have to pull the trigger. As we skulked around the warehouse we tried to keep to the walls, and used our upgrade points on making Jensen quieter than a marshmallow falling on cotton wool. We also upgraded his eyes to see outlines of enemies through walls.

Guards adhered to patterns when patrolling, and we ducked in and out of cover to stay out of their line of sight. The cover mechanic's a little tricky to master, as the viewpoint would change from first-person to third and alter our point of reference. Some surfaces could be used and some couldn't, but with a few months before it's release this an issue that has time to be fixed.

Apart from that the game feels tight. It's not a shooter that can be knocked over with headshots as enemies are forceful, well-armed and quick to hunt you down. It's one of the most intelligent games you'll play this year too, and if you make a mistake it's worth going on to see how that's going to affect you later on. Our final moment with the game was what the team called a 'social boss fight', where the leader of Purity First, Zeke, had a hostage. We had the option to either put a bullet in his head – risky with a human shield – or talk him into letting the woman go. It took reasoning, empathy and a strong conviction that we were only after the Typhoon, not him, before he let the woman go. The conversation was on a knife edge as Jensen edged closer towards Zeke and we thought it was going to end in a showdown.

Human Revolution promises a gripping story and meaningful choices in how you play it. The game doesn't require any prior *Deus Ex* knowledge, but appreciating where it lies in the canon only adds to the anticipation.

Deus Ex Chronology

> **Deus Ex** PC (2000), PS2 (2002) Seminal. This shooter gave players multiple options in upgrading the main character, JC Denton, a nanotech-augmented agent in a cyberpunk world. While it's a bit wonky to play now though, it's still worth going through for the incredible storyline. Set in 2052 the world's being crippled by a man-made virus called Gray Death, and a cure, Ambrosia, is in extremely short supply. The Illuminati, Chinese hackers and the Statue of Liberty all play a part.

> **Deus Ex: Invisible War** PC, Xbox (2004) We reckon it's a shame this was never released on PlayStation. True, it tried to be too much of a philosophy lesson, but it was sound in the way it offered choices for getting through stages. Set in 2072 the actions of JC Denton set the world into a philosophical freefall, creating groups who want to use his power for their own means. Though it fell flat in the last stage (you could determine which ending you wanted in the dying minutes) it still warranted playing through multiple times.



Sometimes actions do speak louder than words

Expected Release: April 21
Developer: Valve
Players: 1-2

PORTAL 2

You'll want to play this if you think that shooters don't always need guns

The original *Portal* was a surprise addition to the excellent value-for-money *Orange Box* that stood beside rather tall and established franchises such as *Half-Life* and *Team Fortress*. To this day it's still a game with a difficult-to-define length: what might take a proficient puzzle gamer a few hours to knock over may take a less-adapted player dozens of hours. Now with the impending release of *Portal 2*, Valve has forged a sequel that's set to push everything to the next level.

The portal gun sits at the core of the *Portal 2* experience. But Valve has thrown in some interesting new puzzling mechanics to keep you on your toes and ensure that *Portal* veterans will have to stretch their brains in new ways. Faith plates propel you from one side of a room to the other, or from plate to plate. Throw a hard surface at the end of your faith-plate arc, and suddenly you have to shoot an entry and exit portal while mid-air.

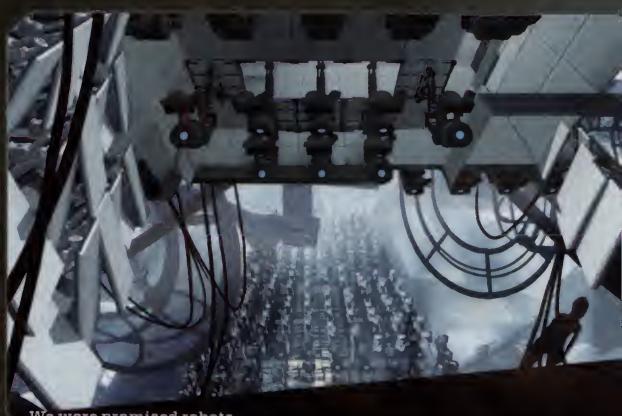
Laser redirection also played a big part in the section we played. The lasers are manipulated by positioning reflective cubes at the right angle. These are also made trickier by the need to throw a portal or two into the mix. The final new tool we saw was repulsion gel. This paint-like substance made the player bounce once contacted, with the bounce proportionate to the height you've jumped from.



We asked Jeep Barnett, one of the founding team members that created *Portal*, about the four-month delay. "There was a major story revision that went on towards the end. We had a lot of stuff in place but we felt that the pacing was a little off. There were some sections that were a little longer than they should be and some sections that were a little shorter. We just kind of reshuffled some levels. And when we reshuffled the levels, we had to change the art themes as well to match up so it fits in the story as well."

Portal 2 also boasts a completely separate cooperative campaign. Barnett, also one of the lead co-op programmers, summed it up nicely. "It's an entirely different campaign and it's got entirely different levels because they have to be designed so they will work with four portals. So just having two players in a single-player level doesn't make it any easier... basically you'd be fighting each other to get to the exit, which doesn't quite make sense."

We played the first few levels of the co-op campaign, which was pretty simple stuff. It mostly involved standing on switches and creating portals for our gaming comrade in



places they couldn't access. But by the end, there were some promises of future depth as the teamwork became more intricate and additional puzzling elements were introduced.

Although we only spent a few hours in total with *Portal 2*, what we played was sufficiently challenging, albeit with a player-friendly learning curve. Better yet, it was all saturated Valve's familiarly warped sense of humour.



Any portal in a storm



Let off some STEAM™

We spoke to Doug Lombardi, vice-president of marketing at Valve, about the introduction of Steam Play: the feature that lets you play *Portal 2* on Mac and/or PC by linking to your PS3 copy. "We're taking a baby step onto the PS3 with *Portal 2* and we'll see how it goes. Our goal is that you buy a game and can access it on whatever machine you're [using]. So if you buy the PS3 version you'll be able to link your Steam account with your PSN account and access the game on your Mac or PC. When you buy music you're not restricted on where you can play it back. So why is that a case with your games?"

Expected Release: Mid 2011
Developer: Codemasters
Players: 1-TBC

BODYCOUNT

You'll want to play this if you want mindless destruction

Fun with a gun" is *Bodycount*'s mantra.

While the point is to blow away the bad guys it wants you to be content being in an empty room with an bullet-spewing machine, wearing a stupid grin and shredding the interior like a cheese grater in a house of parmesan.

We saw it last year where it was little more than the above sentence and big plans of just making the crowded shooter genre more fun. At its very early stage Codemasters was putting huge emphasis on environmental destruction where cover was a precious commodity. The plot – you're a secret agent sent in by The Agency (good guys) to take out The Target (bad guys) – could be the lovechild of Tony Scott and Michael Bay, and the high-contrast artwork lets you know where you should be pointing the barrel of your gun.

With roughly four months to go before going on sale we can hear the alarm bells going off. Yeah, it's following through on the concept and it has a few twists but in 2011, The Year Of The Shooter, *Bodycount* feels about as remarkable as a paperclip.

Our hands-on demo was set in an African mine where four or five different types of enemies came at us, some dumb, some cunning and others just relying on heavy weapons. One, the Medic, who popped up in an open area would revive fallen cohorts but was accompanied by half a dozen other maniacs who roughly stuck in their places but unloaded their arsenal as quickly they could.

Standard shooter controls felt sluggish, and going into iron sights meant we were rooted to the spot but able to duck and lean



in cover. The lean system's a cool idea, as whatever you're hiding behind is likely to be obliterated so instead of popping up and down doing a jack-in-the-box you need to keep moving, however slight. However, it's a pain when you're trying to get a bead on a dude and you're stuck, relying on either grenades or point-blank range to clear the area.

But that's *Bodycount*. It shuns corridors for larger, open areas with goals that take you onto different levels and through and under structures. There's a sense of exploration however it's sullied by constant waypoints that are breadcrumbs to the next mini-objective. So you wind your way through, madly shooting at whatever's coming at you but without discovering it for yourself.

Ammo is abundant – and it needs to be when the point is bullet hell – and is picked up in floating orbs rather than dropped clips. Similarly, blue orbs – intel – are XP points and can be spent later.

The destruction's all right but it's nothing *Battlefield* hasn't done before and it's crippled by the need to keep a level in shape. We couldn't for instance, take down a whole building or make a dent in the metal walkways and steps. Wooden crates felt the wrath of our shotgun though.

Bodycount might not have a place. *Bulletstorm*'s already taken the dumb fun spot, *Killzone 3*'s pipped it for spot battles, and the well-established *Bad Company 2* has nailed deformable cover. While we like the visual style it doesn't do enough to be much fun. Damn it.



Not pictured: bodies

FPS ROUND-UP

Like what you've seen over the past 16 pages? That's not the half of it! 2011 is a simply massive year for shooters and there are plenty of others that are banging for your valuable bucks.



RESISTANCE 3

Expected Release: September 6
Developer: Insomniac Games

Like the Chimeran forces, the *Resistance* series is a shape shifter. Part three of the 'proper' lineage of games has a new protagonist, Joseph Capelli, after Nathan Hale succumbed to the Chimeran virus at the end of *Resistance 2*. Rather than turn alien, Hale received a day-ruining bullet to the head, delivered by Capelli.

Capelli, former member of good guys SRPA, embarks on a mission to New York with scientist Fyodor Malikov to New York City from Oklahoma to get an antidote to the Chimeran virus. The shift from military to renegade changes the weapon design to jury-rigged, ad-hoc contraptions – grenades are re-purposed tins of beans with nails in them. A gas-spewing gun, The Mutator, turns Chimeran forces into walking landmines as they explode from the inside.

There are new enemies too, including the rooftop-bounding Long Legs, which looks like the standard Hybrid but with extra springy legs. You'll also have a more focussed two-player co-op and multiplayer, and Insomniac has ditched the two-weapon system. Rejoice.



SNIPER: GHOST WARRIOR

Expected Release: April
Developer: City Interactive
A sleeper hit on Another Console and PC, selling over a million copies worldwide. Dressed in a ghillie suit you're at times poached in a secure spot with a mighty scope, alming for the grape (that's the 'sniper' bit), or stealthily sneaking through the jungle (satisfying the 'ghost' part of the title) before joining armed forces for a Rambo-like showdown (warrior!). Just hope they fix the patchy AI and crappy graphics from the other versions and this is a viable alternative.



BATTLE: LOS ANGELES

Expected Release: April
Developer: Saber Interactive
It's a perfect concept for a videogame: military versus aliens in a modern day city. This holds potential for a sound movie tie-in, as Aaron Eckhart reprises his role as a Marine Staff Sergeant Michael Nantz, lending his voice to the game. Saber made the more than passable *TimeShift* a few years ago, and are also elbows deep in third-person action game *Inversion*. It also even has multiplayer! It's only going to available on PSN.



DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

Expected Release: May 6
Developer: Gearbox Software
We wrote extensively about the return of the most politically incorrect leading man last issue, and we're waiting along with the rest of the world to see what shape he's in after a 12-year gestation. Expect outlandish antics, smart and utterly quotable one-liners as well as big guns. We like how instead of a health meter you need to keep Duke's ego topped up by catching his reflection and looking at photos of himself.



F.E.A.R. 3

Expected Release: May 26

Developer: Day 1 Studios

Part shooter, part fright-fest with a family so twisted even the Addams Family will think they're weird. Military dude Point Man and his dead brother Paxton Fettel are back and battling their ghostly mother Alma. The game looked a bit lacklustre the last time we saw it but the divergent co-op promises variety in a by-the-numbers shooter. You'll want to be Fettel in co-op, too: he gets to possess people and turn their insides out.



THE DARKNESS II

Expected Release: TBA

Developer: Digital Extremes

The first was definitely one of the most inventive shooters we've seen, as leading man Jackie Estacado has a demon possessing his body that allows him to rapidly sneak up on enemies by skulking through the shadows. Jackie's now the Don of the Estacado family and the demon limbs can now be used for 'quad-wielding', using objects as shields while blasting away with your pistols. Mike Patton of Faith No More fame returns as the voice of The Darkness too.

CALL OF DUTY



RAGE

Expected Release: September 16

Developer: id Software

The inventors of the first-person shooter return with a big, bold post-apocalyptic title that's also partly a dune-buggy racer. id has it running on its bespoke engine, id Tech 5. It's the antithesis to the current glut of corridor shooters.

You play one of humanity's last hope's for survival, the only person to emerge from the Ark, a gigantic underground

chamber built by the government to safely house scientists and other important People from an asteroid that obliterated most of life on Earth. You might be the only person who made it out of the Ark but topside there are other survivors clinging on to what remains, while mutated bandits roam the environment – and they're not happy to see you.

Rather than having individual enemy types there are clans, each with their own attacks, costumes and ways of speaking. It's certainly a dynamic game and one that could make id great again.

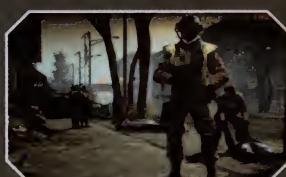
BEST OF THE REST

Don't forget about the 2011 shooters we've already reviewed!



KILLZONE 3

See our review in OPS #53



HOMEFRONT

See our review in OPS #54



CALL OF JUAREZ: THE CARTEL

See page 15 for more details.



BULLETSTORM

See our review on page 75.



CRYYSIS 2

See our review on page 66.



DEAD ISLAND

See page 13 for more details.



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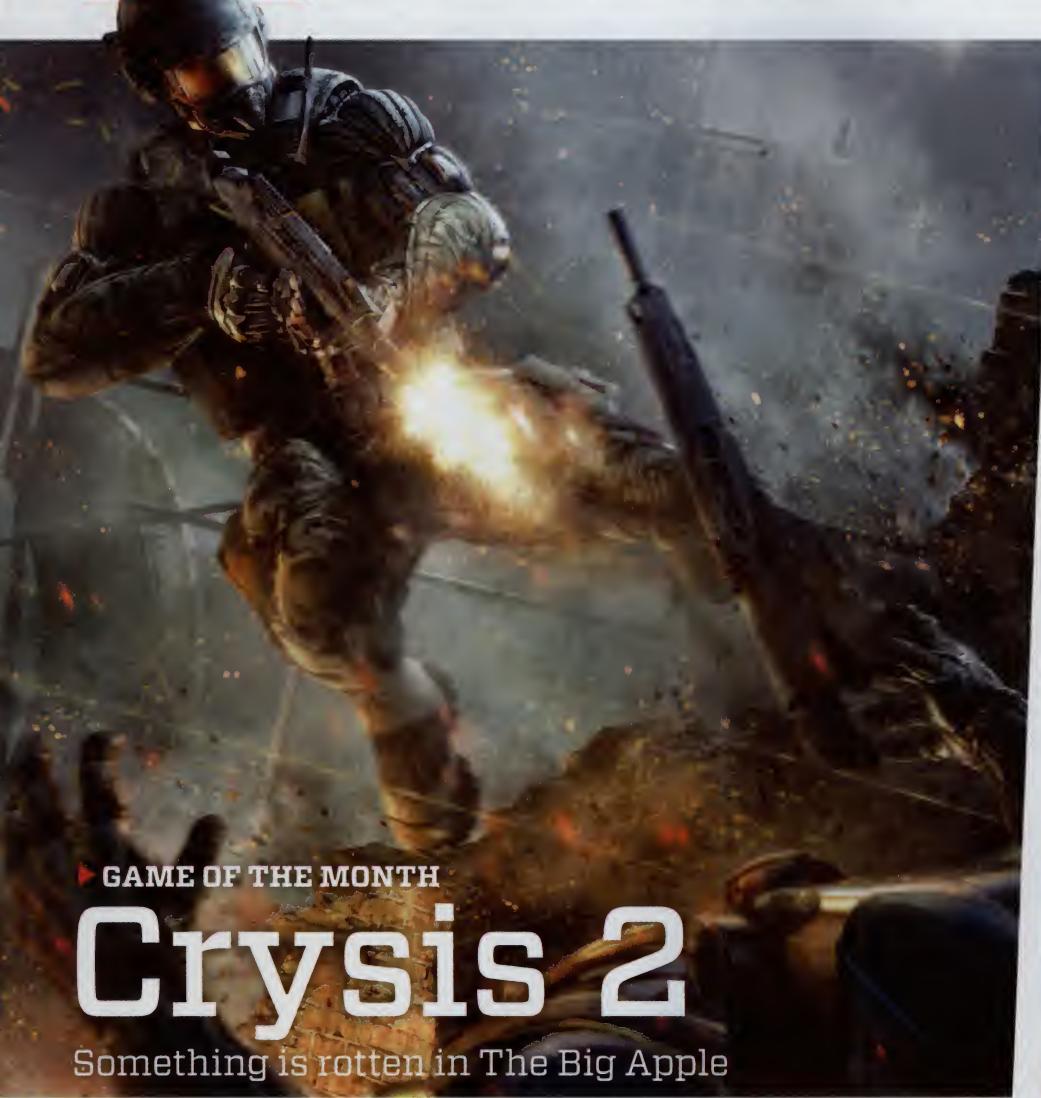


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Review ratings

10 **Incredible:** Perfection is relative and elusive, and no game will ever be *perfect*. Our 10 doesn't mean a game is flawless, it means a game has done everything it set out to do in an *incredible* fashion and thus it deserves our highest possible kudos.

9 **Excellent:** An outstanding game, either limited by its scope, sequel status (and lack of improvement) or a few too many minor blemishes from being a 10. Likely one of the best in its genre, a 9 comes with very high praise.

8 **Great:** Still well ahead of the pack in most departments despite a few issues here and there. Thoroughly recommended.

7 **Good:** A robust package that does a solid job despite a handful of mild to moderate problems. Enjoyable in parts, just not fantastic overall.

6 **Decent:** This game will have some noticeable flaws that may make it hard to recommend to those who aren't fans of the genre, but it will do more right than it does wrong. Just.

5 **Mediocre:** A conceded pass, if you know what we mean. Half okay, but half-busted. Might scrape by for fans, but with the quality games we do have, there's no need to drop real money on a game that half sucks.

4 **Poor:** Anything below 5, strictly speaking, is a fail – but there are degrees of 'bad' just as there are degrees of 'good'. A 4 is unrefined, partially broken and poorly designed.

3 **Very disappointing:** Things start to go very wrong here – fundamentally flawed in many ways, boring and close to pointless.

2 **Terrible:** Nothing good here, and definitely not worth removing the wrapper.

1 **The worst:** Reserved for the very worst gaming could ever offer. A broken, offensive mess without a single redeeming quality. If a 10 is better than virtually every game available, a 1 is worse than virtually every game available. OPS has handed out this score only once.

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80 Beyond Good & Evil HD

81 Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together

81 The 3rd Birthday



▲ We choose to review our games on a super-slick Full HD 1080p 40" Sony Bravia for the best picture possible.

Play this
if you like

Killzone 3, Far Cry 2

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: SHOOTER

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: EA

DEVELOPER: CRYTEK

PLAYERS: 1-12

RRP: \$109.95



What sounds like boring lab research turns out to be light on the borax **and heavy on shooting aliens through the thorax**"



Some people say CoD. We say codpieces

Crysis 2

Suit to thrill, play to kill

To us console gamers *Crysis* was a legendary, mythical beast that was often heard about but never played. Some whispered that it was an FPS Ark of the Covenant which melted the eyeballs of anyone foolish enough to gaze upon it. Others said nay, it was something else; a sibling rivalry sim where one hassled their female kin to tears. Whatever its true form was, all agreed that it really ought to be a multi-platform experience.

With *Crysis 2* Crytek has finally decided to bring the series to (mostly) everyone. But the follow-up that's being shared with us TV folk has had an important organ ripped out of it: freedom. Newcomers who have never sampled this series on PC – and are blissfully ignorant about the shared DNA between it and free-roaming FPS *Far Cry 2* – will run through *Crysis 2* and not even bat an eyelid when their progress is impeded by an invisible wall. Those of us who know better will cry one single, solitary tear and murmur "some birds are too beautiful to be caged".

To its credit, Crytek does offer a sensation of freedom through increased verticality. But while super-jumping through the Big Apple may open up your headspace, you're constantly blinkered in, beelined towards an objective in a linear manner. On the city streets this inelegant process is achieved with barbed wires and high ledges placed just out of your mantle reach. When in interior environments, we are expected to believe that our super soldier protagonist

– a bi-winner known only as 'Alcatraz' – can't escape from a townhouse under chopper fire because pushing open several clearly marked fire exits is beyond his capabilities. Hey, level designers: dude has the strength to kick cars at aliens. Stop painting your damn doors on.

Alcatraz enters the narrative when he's fished from the Hudson River and becomes the inheritor of a Nanosuit 2.0. Think: a titanium exoskeleton that makes the one in *Vanquish* look as stylish and manoeuvrable as an old VW Beetle, and you're on the right page. Once he's encased in this nano-goodness Alcatraz's help is sought out by a scientist hoping to study a link between the suit's technology and that of some calamari-headed aliens invading NYC.

Thankfully, what sounds like boring lab research turns out to be light on the borax and heavy on shooting aliens through the thorax. That, and a human PMC outfit has been given the clearance to run interference on your arse as well. With these opposing forces in place Alcatraz's tale turns out to be a decent yarn, but it has to be said that Crytek flat-out assumes that everybody has finished *Crysis* and *Crysis: Warhead*. It's not sci-fi Shakespeare though – catching up is easy.

The most important character you'll meet in *Crysis 2* is the Nanosuit 2.0. Much like the first game it allows you to divert energy from one of your suit's subsystems to greatly enhance others, and harvesting alien DNA allows you to unlock 12 more abilities.

By default your standard Armour skill lets you turtle-up to deflect bullets and laugh in the face of red barrel explosions. The Power skill lets you move like greased lightning, John Woo slide, super jump and, later on, bust out a high-tech version of the buttstomp. Stealth skills render you practically invisible, offer you contextual stealth kills with a knife and the ability to clearly see enemy footprints. Last but not least, you've got Visor skills to let you enhance your vision to track heat signatures, detect incoming bullet trajectories and you can even scan and mark tactical opportunities (much like you could with *Far Cry 2*'s map). ▶

Multi at a glance

- *Crysis 2* offers all the typical modes you'd expect from a multiplayer shooter, like deathmatch and team deathmatch (called "instant action" in the game), as well as a CTF-style CT Relay. There are six MP modes total, with eight variants to employ; four classes are available, with five extra slots for custom classes and you can progress through 50 ranks online.

- *Crysis 2* requires more finesse to win. Use stealth camo efficiently, and take advantage of the game's over-the-top move-set (read: kick cars at everybody).
- Unlike stealth camo in other shooters, *Crysis 2*'s camo makes you completely invisible to other players, but for a short period of time. Firing a gun while stealth camo is on significantly lowers the time it's available, so melee kill.

NYPD standard procedure for dealing with illegal aliens



Dovetailing perfectly with these god-like powers is the ability to tweak your guns on the fly with your preferred barrel, under-barrel and scope attachments. The focus is on bullet-based firepower here, and with a few button taps you can whack a suppressor on a shotgun, or de-scope a sniper rifle and slap on a laser sight to make it a short range face-ruiner. It's a great customisation system and one that can heighten tension due to the fact that life doesn't magically standstill when you're tinkering. Couple this mechanic with a first-person cover-system that's every bit as polished as *Killzone* 3's, plus the impressive super-powers of the Nanosuit, and you've got a winning combination that makes *Crysis* 2 an extremely tactical shooter.

A lot of this strategic sensation comes from the incredibly slick HUD of the Nanosuit. Amazing new nanoskills are placed (literally) at your fingertips. Every weapon switch spits out a mini stat appraisal of the gun you have. Enemies,



objectives and ammo are easily highlighted on your mini-map. Your suit is even savvy enough to tell you when you've been issued a speeding ticket by the local highway cameras. You're constantly given a feeling of being an elite unit that can take on an entire army, but over-confidence and any lack of proper power-management of your ever-dwindling energy supplies will cut your blitzkrieg short. It's a beautiful gameplay balance.

Though *Crysis* 2 doesn't offer anywhere near the same amount of latitude as *FarCry* 2, your typical firefight will occur in a moderate-sized arena environment packed with enemies. For the most part the fodder that face you are pretty savvy; they'll work in groups, employ armour and fire flares off to call in backup. It has to be said though, we did witness quite a few wig-outs whenever the AI was approached in a confined environment.

We sometimes de-cloaked ourselves in front of a lone soldier, only to have him make a hand signal to his non-existent backup and make a tactically stupid decision. Sometimes that meant running right past us to get cover, other times they'd hide and do nothing for a spell. Admittedly these instances were rare and Crytek says it was aware of the issues,

which means there's a "good chance" they'll be patched out before you read this. Maybe.

If you're an online gamer who prefers their victims to be of human intelligence, *Crysis* 2 will prove to be something out of the ordinary and worth painting on your radar. The most noticeable switch-up is the increased traversal speed of the gladiators; you're going to need the eyes of a hawk and the trigger finger of a skeet shooter to nail your super-jumping, super-sprinting foes. If you'd prefer to be swayed by pedigree, it's worth noting that the multiplayer design was crafted and fine-tuned by Crytek UK, a group who were previously known as Free Radical Design (of *TimeSplitters* fame). The modes they've decided to include are the typical deathmatch/team-based modes you'd expect from any multiplayer shooter. No monkey business, unfortunately.

Taking its cues from *Call of Duty*, *Crysis* 2 tantalises persistent players with killstreak rewards, XP rank ups, drip-fed nano perks and extra weapon attachments. The Nanosuit abilities are slightly expanded over the ones on offer in the single-player campaign and they help to make any round of *Crysis* 2 feel unique to the last. Stealth is the major concern as it renders players utterly invisible, though



Multiplayer tactics 101: Nobody f--ks wth the tripod



Death from above: avoid being below it

You maniacs! You blew it up! Damn you. Damn you all to hell!



“You’re constantly given a **feeling of being an elite unit that can take on an entire army, but over-confidence and any lack of proper power-management of your ever-dwindling energy supplies will cut your blitzkrieg short”**

it can be thwarted by anyone using the perk to see pheromones and footsteps. People who want to be a walking juggernaut can gain a perk that converts kills into armour energy. Likewise, tacticians can catch their enemies off guard by equipping perks to earn faster fire rates, speedier reloads or an additional primary weapon. We only got to spend a modest amount of time testing multi out but we instantly recognised it as a fast, fierce and worthy opponent to the *Call of Duty* behemoth.

Continuing with the positives, *Crysis 2* is quite the looker, to say the very least. For the longest time it was said that the *Crysis* series could only be run on a PC powered by unicorn giggles, but certainly not a console. Well, so much for that theory. *Crysis 2* is a visual colossus whose set-piece moments do a brilliant job of aping disaster films such as *2012* and *Cloverfield*. The lighting system in particular needs special mention as it often gave us shoelace rash on our chins. Watching the God rays pierce through smoke and debris clouds is truly beautiful. The scale in the environments are equally breath-taking and they’re matched with some meticulous attention to detail in the nitty gritty, street-side objects.

Unfortunately *Crysis 2* is held back from toppling *Killzone 3*; the visuals can be just as inconsistent and immersion-stunting as the AI. Repeat offenders include late drawn textures and objects, shadowing weirdness at a distance and we saw a few bodies clip through walls. The framerate can stumble a bit too, especially when you’re swarmed by enemies. Granted, we experienced these chugs when we tried to take the road less travelled; in some sections we used invisibility to avoid combat, thereby increasing the number of active enemies in a level. So yeah, it probably won’t be too much of a problem for the classic, kill-everybody player.

Crysis 2’s fabled CryEngine3 isn’t as perfect and polished as it could be but it’s still one hell of a good first effort. Realistically, this was never going to out-perform a supercomputer PC with the specs of Skynet. But there’s no denying that this game easily earns a place in the absolute upper echelon of PS3 visuals.

It’s disappointing that *Crysis 2* doesn’t offer the near-sandbox antics of its predecessor. But if you’re new to the series – as many PS3 owners no doubt will be – it’s difficult to fault the direction Crytek has taken with this sequel.

Compared to most other shooters that force you down a linear path, *Crysis 2* offers a degree of tactical variability and freewheeling fun that sets it apart from the average. Don’t make the mistake of viewing *Crysis 2* as a new shooter on the block who has to desperately prove itself to size up to all the established PS3 heavy-hitters. In many ways it’s actually the other way around.

Adam Mathew



Final Say

PRESENTATION Beautiful and with a lively palette. Held back from toppling *Killzone 3* by a few niggling bugs.

SOUND Capable voice acting and the various suit noises make you feel like a more athletic version of Robocop.

CONTROLS Nanosuit powers are mapped to make sense but we do call shenanigans on the “double tap a face button to equip grenades” idea.

REPLAY VALUE Superlative multiplayer forged by ex-Free Radical staff and there are tonnes of collectibles to find.

Verdict

As slick as the Nanosuit it depicts. Acquire target.

9

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: SPORTS
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: EA
CANADA
PLAYERS: 1-2
RRP: \$109.95

"Risin' up, back on the street
 did my time, took my chances"



Play this
 if you like

*Fight Night Round
 4, any Rocky movie
 except Rocky V*



Fight Night Champion

There ain't nothin' over 'til it's over

For a generation weaned on *Rocky* movies *Fight Night Champion* is the ultimate boxing experience.

It sounds like a throwaway sentence, really. A platitude you toss at an otherwise good game to get the hard work out of the way. It's completely true though.

Champion's knockout hook is its new Champion Mode; a narrative-driven five-or-so hour experience splicing typical *Fight Night* boxing action with a bevy of cutscenes stitching this whole tale of the tape together. Champion Mode is the story of Andre Bishop, a young boxing prodigy trying to fulfil his late father's dreams by becoming the Middleweight Champion of the World.

We love it. EA has taken a real risk diverting time and resources into Champion Mode; if the team couldn't pull it off *Fight Night Champion* could've been a rendered a real turkey. It helps that boxing lends itself so well to this sort of drama, but it primarily works because it's so impressively crafted. It's an entirely predictable story and features all the characters you'd expect – the corrupt boxing promoter, the jealous brother, the sassy lead female, the arrogant heel, the old-fashioned trainer in a flat cap – but it's just so damned entertaining. The script is tight, peaking at all the right moments with a flash of emotion or a well-timed curse, and the performances are subtle and believable. Andre Bishop is a genuinely likeable lead and by the time you mount his comeback, if you're like us, you won't stop until you've reached the credits.

What's particularly clever about Champion Mode is the way it pulls strings in the background to heighten the tension. During the fights throughout the story you might find yourself nursing a broken hand, or suddenly at the mercy of a bent referee or a desk full of bribed judges. Champion Mode will uppercut you with surprises like these, ones that require you to adjust the way you're fighting, across its duration. Champion Mode is bold, different and we absolutely want more of it.

We should stress that Champion Mode is not a replacement Legacy Mode. Legacy Mode returns after learning a lot from EA Sports MMA.

Champion introduces a more complex improvement system that separates your boxing skills from your athleticism. Skill training takes the form of interactive mini-games and every training session nets you a certain amount of XP.

XP can be allocated to 17 different areas and whether you distribute them evenly across your entire punch arsenal or instead

max out your left hook so it gains flash KO potential is up to you. *Champion* gives you considerably more freedom to create a boxer with a unique style.

The athleticism angle means that, while a fit 20-year-old fighter will be in great shape and be able to avoid injuries, an older warhorse will need to spend time with athletics programmes so that they can stay physically competitive. The addition of an economy means the purses you appear for provide the cash you'll need to afford training camps. It's far more involved than ever.

The changes to the controls for *Champion* also represent a big improvement. Thanks to what EA is calling Full Spectrum Punch Control simply flicking the stick in a clock direction is enough to throw a punch. It's easier on the thumbs than constant quarter circles and it allows for far more realistically quick combinations. Haymakers are gone and a power modifier button means you can load any strike with a little extra sauce, at the expense of a large chunk of puff. Blocking has been streamlined and is handled automatically with one button, but successful combos will break through blocks. *Champion* is a faster and even more tactical game as a result. You have to manage your stamina effectively so that you can apply consistent pressure.

Fight Night Champion is a great update in an already great series. Best of all? The PS3 version now features custom ring walk music. Hell. Yes. **Luke Reilly**

Can you feel it in the air tonight?

The robust boxer creator uses the PlayStation Eye to scan in your face. Our results were mixed because the game couldn't really deal with Adam's beard. Still, if you want to get knock out by Mike Tyson this is the safest way.

Final Say

PRESENTATION The graphics are stunning. The collision detection is virtually perfect. Fantastic production values.

SOUND More dynamic crowds, rousing Champion Mode music and universally excellent voice acting. The commentary is starting to feel a bit overripe though.

CONTROLS The new punch system is so much better than it was in *Fight Night Round 4*.

REPLAY VALUE Champion Mode demands more the one visit; Legacy Mode and online bouts will keep you around for ages.

Verdict

A sports game like no other. Turn up the Bill Conti, lace up and get into the ring.

9

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SHIFT 2: Unleashed

The SHIFT hits the fan

It's official: *Gran Turismo 5* is on notice. Like *V8 Supercars 3* wooed us from *GT4* back in the halcyon days of PS2, *SHIFT 2 Unleashed* is currently busy courting us with its incredible sense of speed, well-rounded garage, long list of tracks and impressive attention to detail.

Its biggest bullet-point is the fancy new helmet cam. It certainly takes some getting used to. Until you get a feel for it the driver's turning head is incredibly deceptive. Because your driver's head turns before the car does you'll likely have trouble finding the right degree of steering input to take the corner. You'll either miss the apex entirely or turn too much and oversteer horribly into the Armco. You need to learn how to treat the driver's head completely independently of the car and the steering. More importantly, however, you need to start thinking like an actual racing driver.

Normal racing games have a very narrow field of vision, which is somewhat unnatural. The camera is always centred directly at what's in front of you. When driving at speed in a real car on a race circuit, however, the piece of track immediately in front of you is less important than

the piece of track fast approaching. What *SHIFT 2*'s camera is attempting to do is exactly what a real race driver will instruct you to do: look through the corner, to the exit. What *SHIFT 2*'s camera does, then, is force you to drive like a real race driver, focusing on where you're going to put the car rather than where it is now.

It's tough, but persist and it's significantly more immersive than we initially gave it credit for. It's easier to grasp with a wheel; not just because it's the most intuitive way of playing any racing game but because holding a wheel gives you a better sense your car's direction than a single thumb on a stick. *SHIFT 2* works with the Logitech G27 Racing Wheel among others (with clutch and full support for all buttons). We haven't been able to successfully drift with the new helmet cam because it's too hard to judge the correct mix of steering and throttle to maintain a good drift when the driver is looking out the side window and we lose all context of where the car is pointing.

Happily, while Slightly Mad Studios is clearly pleased with the helmet cam (and the way it functions in the game) the team hasn't let pride

get in the way of pragmatism. A 'regular' cabin view still features, along with the normal chase, bumper and bonnet options. Yet even these conventional views are blessed with clever touches to increase the sense of velocity. Watch as the camera falls back a little at high speed and tucks back up behind the rear of the car under heavy braking, or how the HUD bounces slightly with imperfections in the track surfaces.

An introductory race will suggest the level of difficulty best for your driving skills and style. There are five general layers of difficulty, although you can tweak each variable individually to tailor the game to your own tastes. We settled with a driving model featuring limited to no driving aids, meaning staying on the road was mostly our responsibility – not the electronic nannies buried in the gizzards of our race cars. From then it's off on a career that spans a variety of racing.

The handling actually has a truly satisfying bite to it. *SHIFT 2* has a far better sense of speed than *GT5* so driving at normal cornering speeds still feels as quick as it ought to, and balancing the car on the edge of adhesion is a delicate game. You can't barge your way around the track either – *SHIFT 2* features a considerably heftier damage model to *GT5*.

SHIFT 2's AI drivers impressed us mightily, behaving far more believably than those in *GT5*. Get up alongside another car, for instance, and edge towards them and they will gently veer away. They will not simply allow you to hit them if they can help it. Sneak up inside an opponent on a corner approach, past their B-pillar generally, and they'll sacrifice the inside line to you. They won't just turn in on you and cause a pile-up, desperate to stick to the pre-scripted racing line. If there's been a racing sim in recent memory featuring opponents with a more authentic sense of your presence on the track we don't recall it.

You could argue the visuals lack a bit of zest at times; *SHIFT 2* is not quite as sexy an affair as last year's *Hot Pursuit* or its chief competition *GT5*. We think it's mainly the tracks, which can be a little on the drab side. Still, if a little less fidelity in the surroundings is the technical concession we need to absorb in order to get the additional effects

Play this
if you like

Need for Speed SHIFT,
Gran Turismo 5, F1 2010

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: RACING
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: SLIGHTLY
MAD STUDIOS
PLAYERS: 1-12
RRP: \$109.95



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SHIFT 2 boasts so be it.

We love, for instance, the leaf litter on certain points around some tracks that is whipped up by cars ahead of you. We love the fact that stray from the racing line on a corner and you'll hoon through a carpet of tyre debris. Flecks of molten rubber will strike your windscreens in cabin view. They fade after a short time but it's a cool touch. We love the lighting model. Unlike *GT5*, *SHIFT 2* has a new renderer capable of delivering night racing across *all* the game's tracks, so every track in the game can be raced in the dark. *SHIFT 2* actually looks better once the sun's down; it's in the darkness that you can appreciate how trailing cars cast long, dynamic shadows of your own car against upcoming surfaces and light up your cockpit with a white glow when they're tailgating you.

SHIFT 2 doesn't support splitscreen – a shame considering Codemasters is finally bringing it back in *DIRT 3* – although it does support online multiplayer with up to 12 cars racing at once.

While *SHIFT 2* features more cars than any other *Need for Speed* game to date (around 120, in fact) we have two general gripes. In the lead up to *SHIFT 2*'s release Slightly Mad has been quick to point out you don't need 1000 cars, and we don't disagree. We'd say you just need the right mix. *SHIFT 2* gets close but, while it features the full grid of FIA GT1 World Championship and GT3 European Championship machines (plus a host of other hi-po supercars to boot), it's a little lighter in some vehicle types. We feel *SHIFT 2* could've done with a few more entry level cars, like hot hatches and performance saloons,



The reason why we keep our windscreens sprayed turned completely around

plus a few more older cars. All we would've liked is a little less repetition in the fields. After *GT5* it feels a little samey to have four or so of the same model on track at once. To be fair, all of *SHIFT 2*'s cars feature an exhaustive list of visual and performance customisation options, plus pre-made liveries and a livery editor. The ability to give any car you own the Works treatment and dress it up as a real race car reminds of the original *Gran Turismo*'s racing modifications.

Our other problem is the presence of Bathurst but the lack of any local V8s. Executive producer Marcus Nilsson was unable to answer our Holden vs. Ford question the last time we spoke and we've been unable to ascertain whether they're just not available to EA or they were simply omitted from the final roster.

Still, with a flexible and lengthy career mode and the next iteration of the *Need for Speed* series' new Autolog system tracking your every achievement and car purchase (and issuing automatic challenges to you and your mates) *SHIFT 2 Unleashed* is 2011's serious racer to beat.

Forget what you think you know about where *Need for Speed* games stand in the racing sim landscape because the crew at Slightly Mad Studios has just taken a bulldozer to it.

– Luke Reilly



Little things

There are a few little touches Slightly Mad seems to have missed – as moving the right stick allows you to look around the cabin it'd be nice if the game detected we were looking into the rear vision mirror rather than leaving it blurred out – but for the most part *SHIFT 2* is nicely honed with subtle details. For instance, the semi-transparent on-screen dials (outside of cabin view) are actually cleverly disguised wing mirrors. Nice.

Final Say

PRESENTATION Less sexy than *Hot Pursuit* but hugely visceral and packed with great little details

SOUND Great collision noises. Turn it up loud.

CONTROLS The handling model impresses and makes for extremely exciting racing.

REPLAY VALUE The long list of tracks and online multiplayer should keep engines running for some time.

Verdict

Bolstered by a little DLC this could stay in our consoles all year. If you own *GT5* you need to try this.

9

Audio cue: the racing equivalent of the *Jaws* theme

MotorStorm Apocalypse

Armageddon outta here

You could say *MotorStorm Apocalypse* takes a leaf out of *Split/Second*'s book, although it might be more accurate to say it takes three or four chapters out of it then adds some motorcycles and monster trucks. There's obviously more to it than that but it's a tidy way of summing it up.

Apocalypse sticks to the fundamentals of the series but takes the racing from back-of-beyond desert and jungle bashing to an urban environment, specifically an evacuated coastal city in the middle of momentous earthquake. The MotorStormers plan to get in, drive around a bit and bug out before all the buildings come down.

The reason it smacks of *Split/Second* is because many of *Apocalypse*'s tracks

dynamically change as you race around them. A collapsing bridge or structure, for instance, may mean that subsequent laps follow a modified route. It's scripted, naturally, so it becomes less impactful the more you race a circuit but it makes for some pretty engaging racing – at least on the first few attempts.

There are a few standout track configurations, such as Skyline (which sees you racing over the roofs of destroyed skyscrapers), but for the most part they're considerably less memorable than the original *MotorStorm*'s brilliantly designed tracks. They're also a lot more claustrophobic and overuffed with debris, looters and armed security forces; it can be frustratingly hard to find shortcuts within the chaos. While *Apocalypse* improves markedly of the visual quality of its predecessors the art shift from vast open areas and rainforests to a purely concrete jungle feels like a step down.

It still feels like *MotorStorm*, however, which is obviously crucial. Boosting still provides that much-needed speed burst at the risk of causing your engine to explode. A new tweak to the system allows you to cool your engine by getting off the throttle while in mid-air. Anything that incentivises big jumps is okay by us. All you favourite vehicle classes still feature and Evolution has added a few extras. We didn't find ourselves preferring any of them to the dirtbikes and monster trucks but we couldn't say they worsened the racing in any real way.

Aside from the single-player story mode *Apocalypse* ships with a haul of bonus

Pictured: the dickless wonders who chuck crap off bridges



events, collectables and a solid online mode. We have to praise Evolution for refusing to sacrifice the four-player splitscreen multiplayer too, particularly in an age where publishers would rather you bought four copies of the game rather than one and shunned visiting a friend in favour of racing over the internet.

Unfortunately, *Apocalypse*'s story mode turned out to be a bit of a wart on its otherwise fresh complexion. Like *Test Drive Unlimited 2* before it the cutscenes in *Apocalypse* are universally terrible. The obviously deliberate digital comic approach feels cheap too, making the sequences feel like placeholders for real animation that never eventuated. It's all a bit childish, really, and features the worst approximation of a foreign accent since Christopher Lambert tried to sound like a Scotsman in *Highlander*. You'll know it when you hear it. We do question why Evolution bothered devoting manpower to the story mode and we'd be happy not to see it again.

Fortunately, players will spend far more time playing *Apocalypse* than they will do with awful cutscenes. The racing is still furious and fun – and that's always the main thing.  Luke Reilly



Final Say

PRESENTATION A noticeable step up from *Pacific Rift*. Still, the cutscenes feel a bit cheap.

SOUND Loses a little flavour due to a switch to an original score rather than rocking songs.

CONTROLS Slightly more forgiving than past *MotorStorm* titles.

REPLAY VALUE Lots to do, even outside of the grating story mode.

Verdict

The new locale lacks some of the charm of past environments but the racing is as insane as ever. Well-polished and good fun.

8

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: SHOOTER
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: EA
DEVELOPER: PEOPLE
CAN FLY
PLAYERS: 1-4
RRP: \$109.95

Play this if you like

The Club, Unreal Tournament III

Bulletstorm

Whip it real good

It's a hard life for a B-grade action hero. After leading his crew of elite soldiers through countless successful missions, never questioning orders, Grayson Hunt grows a conscience and a pair. He and his merry band of miscreants go rogue, tell their General to shove it and spend the next couple of years with a bounty on their heads big enough to lure Boba Fett out of the Sarlacc pit.

The stage is set for a confrontation of David and Goliath proportions. With his measly little space ship, Hunt incapacitates the General's battle cruiser and both crash land on former resort planet, now happy mutant hunting ground, Stygia. Scouring the planet axing everything that stands between them and payback.

The above set-up is just a means to an end. The end is to decimate, decapitate and

disintegrate every damned thing. To help you along with this worthy goal you find an electro-leash to whip enemies into all sorts of nasty hazards, kick, slide or thump them to the ground and finish them off all slow motion like, and have an arsenal of cool concept death dealers to get the job done right. Sounds peachy don't it? Well it ain't *quite*.

Things start well enough. Spending a good deal of the opening tutorial drunk on space moonshine left us expecting something special. Unfortunately it didn't feel to us like everything we'd been promised.

Grayson just doesn't move anywhere near as smoothly as we expected. The lack of a jump button in 2011 feels a little dated and his slide move – where you can skid at least 10 metres, uphill, from a standing stand – feels overpowered and a bit dumb. It's great People Can Fly figured out a way of incentivising killing via the Skillshot system, but the constant need to complete them to buy upgrades and charges for your weapons began to grate. We loved the Flail Gun's explosive charges, The Head Hunter's guidable sniper shells were extremely inventive and the Boneduster shotgun was

brutality personified. We just wish that some of the secondary fires weren't unlocked so late in the game and cost so damned much.

Visually it's a mixed bag. The graphics suffer from constant pop-in texturing, jaggy lines and it can look messy up close. Not the desired effect given the luscious footage we've been privy to. Each block-buster set piece lost its impact as we couldn't help but think of how average and unbalanced it looked. The ginormous wheel sequence on the train tracks did nothing for us. The section where we controlled a mecha-



According to census reports, the mutant population exploded in 2520

godzilla lost its bite, and the helicopter battle against the massive dinosaur Hekaton had us wishing we were extinct.

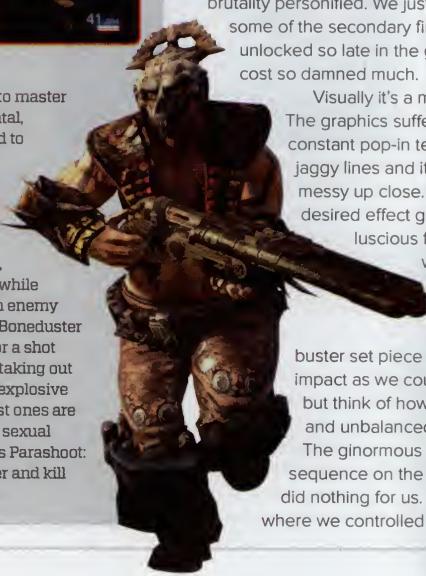
The game has no player-versus-player online modes but it does have a co-op mode called Anarchy that allows a group of players to team up and take on increasingly difficult waves of enemies. Earn enough points and you'll move forward to the next wave. It's a clever idea, and one that encourages teamwork. It's a better use of *Bulletstorm*'s hook. Another mode, called Echoes, lets you replay certain portions of the single-player campaign, attempting to maximise your score. Said scores are posted to an online leaderboard. These modes are arguably better than the main game at doing what *Bulletstorm* has set out to do.

The biggest problem *Bulletstorm* has is that it's at odds with itself. It wants you to have a blast killing imaginatively, but gives you limited ammunition, uses cheap tactics and saves the best toys until way too late in the game. It wants you to revel in the wonderfully hackneyed story, but then suddenly gets all touchy feely, serious and humourless for no reason. It's afraid to go the whole hog. Stick to your guns next time fellas. **Dave Kozicki**



Fish in a barrel

There are so many Skillshots to master (weapon specific, environmental, sadistic) you'll be hard pressed to unlock them all but we have a few favourites. There's Vertigo for kicking anyone over an edge at great heights, Sausage Fest for killing with an exploding hotdog cart, Intoxicated for popping shots while boozed, Juggler for keeping an enemy airborne with two successive Boneduster blasts, Rear Entry (pictured) for a shot in the arse and Gang Bang for taking out multiple targets with a single explosive Flail Gun shot. Still, the funniest ones are the ones that aren't laced with sexual innuendo. One of our faves was Parashoot: lasso an enemy from a chopper and kill him before he hits the ground.



Final Say

PRESENTATION The Unreal Engine still has problems on PS3 with jaggy lines and pop in textures abounding.

SOUND Orchestral score feels wrong, yet oh so right.

CONTROLS Not as fluid or smooth as we'd hoped.

REPLAY VALUE Anarchy mode will have you playing with your mates, but there's little reason to hit single player again.

Verdict

Lacking the commitment to its B-grade formula, with late unlocks and somewhat inconsistent graphics.

7

Back

Star Trek: The Next Generation

Locutus of Borg: Resistance is futile

Play this if you like

Movies

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: PARTY

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: AIE

DEVELOPER: BLITZ

GAME STUDIOS

PLAYERS: 1-2

RRP: \$89.95



More

Perform

Yoostar 2

We'd like to thank the Academy...

There's nothing else like Yoostar 2 on PS3, and for that we need to give both the developer and the publisher credit. Doing something different is a considerably less straightforward task than simply aping something else.

Movie karaoke isn't a new phenomenon but Yoostar 2 has brought it into the videogame space with some digital wizardry. Yoostar 2, in that case, is to movie karaoke what Rock Band is to drumming along to the radio on your steering wheel.

Yoostar 2 (the first was a PC-only game) uses the PlayStation Eye to place you into famous movie scenes in real-time, allowing you to assure a group of schoolchildren your headache isn't a tumour in *Kindergarten Cop*, explain your herpes simplex 10 symptoms to a maître d' in *Beverly Hills Cop* and violently remind

an envoy what town he just entered in *300*. The PlayStation Eye will take a shot of the room without you in it and, when you step back in, you'll be cut out and displayed on screen.

Yoostar 2 offers single- and multiplayer options but the game is only at its most enjoyable in a group setting. Some scenes feature two characters and can be played together. There sometimes doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason to the way each scene is scored (you get credit for waiting your turn to speak and timing your lines correctly). It struck us as a game you'd play for fun rather than scores though.

For a small-time project they've been able to secure a lot of great content, including scenes from *The Godfather*, *Kick-Ass*, *The Hangover*, *The Terminator*, *Tropic Thunder* and many more. It won't be long before you've exhausted it all though so, if you're not planning to bolster the scene selection with the steady stream of DLC the publisher is promising, you might tire quickly.

There are some technical imperfections; we found the lights in our office played hell with the camera and resulted in elements of the kitchen behind us popping up during gameplay as on-screen artefacts. Dimming the lights mostly fixed this but it remained a little grainy. The mic also has a habit of picking up rogue sounds and scoring you on them, both positively and negatively.

You'll want to place the camera above your TV rather than below it. The script appears towards the top of the screen, so with the camera below all your replayed performances would feature you looking upwards like a child in an aquarium. You'll also need to make sure your mates sit wide of the camera unless you want a



Switching to Guns

Top Gun doesn't feature as one of the scored scenes with dialogue but it does feature as one for the game's general backgrounds (along with the *Scarface* mansion and a few others). The actors have still been digitally erased so they're fit for improvising over. We'd like to see some wannabe Maverick's hammering it up so be sure to send us any links if you attempt it.

"KAAAHHHHNNNN!" "KAAAAAAHHHHNNNN!"



Rehearsal

300

This is Sparta!

Scripted Ad-Lib



few unexpected cameos during your performances.

Web connectivity means clips from Yoostar 2 can be uploaded directly to the likes of Facebook from the game as soon as they're completed. We imagine the best clips will be from users who really get into the experience, either via the use of costumes or some other special hook (say, impersonating Christopher Walken in every single movie available).

Yoostar 2 is far from perfect but it is very different. If you love movies, or have a belly full of beer, we can't really see you not enjoying this.  **Luke Reilly**

Final Say

PRESENTATION The interface is nice and simple and the placement of gamers into movie scenes on the fly is clever stuff, if a bit grainy.

SOUND Some of the voiceovers may seem a little quiet at a rowdy party.

CONTROLS Works with PlayStation Move or a regular control pad.

REPLAY VALUE It won't take long to burn through the scenes that ship on the disc. Hopefully DLC will keep it fresh.

Verdict

A unique party game that should find a keen audience. Play it with the right group of friends and it's a good laugh.

7

Top Spin 4

Tennis games: they're a racquet



Celebrate that win with an on court victory boof

Play this if you like

Virtua Tennis 3, Pat Rafter

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: SPORTS
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: 2K
DEVELOPER: 2K CZECH
PLAYERS: 1-4
RRP: \$99.95

Top Spin 3 was more like a McEnroe frustration sim than a tennis game. Lesser beings lacking the reflexes of a ninja mongoose on Red Bull found every shot to be morbidly unfair. Top Spin 4 pulls this difficulty back and, as a direct result, makes itself a court appearance worth showing up for.

Unfortunately the Move controls have turned out to be a real flop. Rather than the same sort of control over your racquet as, say, the ping pong in *Sports Champions*, Top Spin 4's controls feel significantly dumbed down. There really doesn't appear to be any connection between your player's arm and your actual arm – backhands you perform in your living room will be regularly interpreted as forehands by the game and there doesn't appear to be much

difference between a spirited sledge and a apathetic wiggle of the wrist.

Worse still, because you direct your shot with the same stick you move around the court with the experience can be quite frustrating. On some occasions we'd run to the ball, bring up our arm to play a shot and our player would simply run away from the ball, because we'd began to direct our shot before the game realised we were playing one.

The best way to play *Top Spin 4* is with a controller; with a controller it's actually very good. The game features timing meters now to help you improve your ball striking. It's also no longer skewed toward power-hitters like *Top Spin 3*. There are three main playstyles this time around: baseline offense, baseline defense and serve-and-volley.

A revamped career mode will change the way you approach levelling up; the XP is capped at level 20 and some traits of your player can't be directly pumped up.

Like *NBA 2K11* before it, *Top Spin 4* capitalises on the love for former players by including a nice list of former greats, including Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Björn Borg, Boris Becker, Jim Courier, Michael Chang and Aussie Pat Rafter.  Clint McCredie

Final Say

PRESENTATION The player models look a little zombie-like but the courts aren't too bad.

SOUND Nice crowd effects; the umpire regularly needs to tell them to shut up.

CONTROLS The Move controls are a fizzer but it feels more than adequate with a control pad.

REPLAY VALUE Will vary depending on your love of tennis.

8

Verdict

We'll wait until *Virtua Tennis 4* until we declare a winner, but this is good.

PlayStation Move Heroes

Mini games, maxi characters



Clank pales in comparison to Robert Cop. You Google now

Play this if you like

Sports Champions, actual mini golf

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: PARTY
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: SONY
DEVELOPER: NIHILISTIC
SOFTWARE:
PLAYERS: 1-2
RRP: \$79.95

Six of PlayStation's platforming icons come together in this capable set of mini games that's squarely aimed at kids in terms of gameplay. However, it's likely to appeal to their parents too, plus anyone else who played these character's original games early last decade.

There's a plot in there but it's of no consequence, and the games themselves aren't particularly varied. It also takes a little while for them to become interesting and challenging as you'll be repeating the same four or five types of games over and over. You'll throw a flying disc that can be guided after launch by twisting and moving the Move controller, shoot robots and sword-wielding aliens in a third-person action

game, crack an electric whip, hit things with a hammer or sword and er, go bowling.

The bowling part is also a mixture of crazy golf and, like the flying disc levels, you can control the ball after release by flicking and twisting the Move controller. These two games are the best out of the bunch, followed by the shooting bits and the parts where you're manically flicking your Move controller around hitting stuff with your hammer.

However, the levels where you need to decimate enemies with the whip is frustrating due to a patchy camera. Using a DualShock or Navigation Controller you move your character around and also aim with , but it often takes a second or so for the camera to catch up. Just keep cracking the whip and you'll make it through.

PlayStation Move Heroes isn't a bad game, just a bit bland. It might not be what some people expect based on the box, either – particularly *Jak & Daxter* fans. It'll keep the kids happy, though.

 Paul Taylor



Ratchet & Clank: [Insert Innuendo] Ha! Insert

Final Say

PRESENTATION Colourful, polished and pretty cutesy.

SOUND Good voice acting but a little too cheesy.

CONTROLS Twitchy in the disc levels but the rest is fine.

REPLAY VALUE Lots of hidden collectibles will keep OCD types hunting, and heaps of Trophies too.

7

Verdict

Got kids who are easily entertained? Get them this. Adults, keep a copy of *Sports Champions* on hand, though.



Battlefield vasectomies: your Darkspawning days are well over

Dragon Age II

Will this sequel drag on for an age?



Play this if you like

Mass Effect 2, The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION RPG

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: EA

DEVELOPER: BIOWARE

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$109.95

Dragon Age II may have a Peter Jackson budget for scriptwriting and voice talent but it can also feature the lacklustre set design of *Xena: Warrior Princess*. After experiencing what wonders BioWare is capable of with *Mass Effect 2*, the difference in presentation quality between those two productions can stick out worse than a bad earring on an elf.

You'll get an inkling as to how inconsistent the graphics are in the opening scenes. As an enigmatic hero-to-be named Hawke, you'll be pursued through the wild, fairly low-poly, uninspired environs of Ferelden. Though the conversation scenes with party members still offer the best digital acting this side of *L.A. Noire*, every time you sally forth to fight Darkspawn or investigate a city the visuals will fluctuate from fantastic to functional. Also, the ability to walk straight through some people (but not others) is an ability not be listed in your skill tree but it rears its ugly head anyway.

For some dungeon dwellers such immersion destruction might cause a +10 rage refund. But

thankfully BioWare has the chops to pick up the slack in other areas, namely with a near perfect approach to the quest/loot/XP cycle and fascinating party members who are riddles wrapped in enigmas. Unfortunately, Hawke's own decade-spanning tale takes too long to get rolling and the late emergence of a true antagonist is a bit annoying. Also, by limiting Hawke's race and class (it's mage, rogue, warrior, or nothing now), BioWare has lessened the joy of customisation that made the predecessor so appealing. Mind you, having a fully-voiced hero is a vast improvement over mute-simulator *Origins*.

The death-dealing has changed considerably too as you're no longer micro-managing, issuing commands and watching them (eventually) happen when the game rolls the dice. During the first few hours many will mistake the new 'one-button-to-attack' mashing as a bad day in *Dynasty Warriors*. But give your characters time to learn spells and abilities (mapped to face buttons and various other toggles) and you'll come to appreciate more immediate response battling that requires sensible cool-down management. The equipment and levelling menus are still gloriously stat heavy but the talent trees have also been streamlined to offer you simplified paths to whichever skills you want.

Ultimately *Dragon Age II* feels like a one step past, and two steps back from *Origins*. It has been specced purely with us console gamers in mind and now has a low barrier of entry that will rally new fans to the *Dragon Age* banner. That's admirable, but fans who did get into *Origins* will lament the less masterful storytelling and the noticeably uneven visual presentation.

Taken on its own merits *Dragon Age II* is still an extremely solid RPG that deserves to be scooped up in three shakes of a dragon's tail.

Adam Mathew



"Who's with me? Dry cleaning bill be daaamned!"

Final Say

PRESENTATION All over the place. Great acting scenes. Drab, lifeless environments plagued with graphics hiccups like enemy pop-in and NPCs you can walk through.

SOUND Finally a fully-voiced protagonist. Wonderful voice acting, as always. Attack sound effects need a bit more variety though.

CONTROLS Simple but with a decent amount of underlying depth. Pausing to issue orders is there but it is woefully done and barely required.

REPLAY VALUE Down from the last game. Only one character with three classes to choose from in one framed story.

Verdict

Great for *Dragon Age* newbies. An acquired taste for any returning fans unaccustomed to change. Still one helluva RPG in anyone's book.

8

LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

Send in the clones



It's a long way down don't le'go *Badum-tish*



Play this if you like

LEGO Indiana Jones 2

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: ACTION

RELEASE:

DISTRIBUTOR:

ACTIVISION

DEVELOPER:

TRAVELLER'S TALES

PLAYERS: 1-2

RRP: \$79.95

In the interest of saving space, LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone

Wars will heretofore be referred to with the guttural noise *LSWIII/TCW*. We'll also save space by telling you that the gameplay hasn't changed much: you're still platforming about in an effort to pick up more studs than a desperate housewife on herbal viagra.

This third LEGO Star Wars focuses on the two seasons of the animated *Clone Wars* TV series, but there are head nods and unlockables for the six movies as well. Noticeable improvements to the formula include a 'scene swap' feature,

where you can switch between characters in separate locations to complete multi-part objectives. There is also a smattering of some mini-game elements, such as commanding a large army across battlefields and the space flight sections offer freer, more 3D movement.

Traveller's Tales wisely decided to deepen the combat by increasing the on-screen enemy count and they equip you with more fluid lightsaber combos, dual-wielding and offensive force abilities. The boss battles are now much more satisfying and dramatic too, thanks to quick-time events which illicit cooler, more organic-looking finishing moves.

Beyond the usual co-op antics is a new 'plastic-head-to-plastic-head' battle mode which features an upgraded level builder. Through it you and a buddy can create your own customised bases and attempt to knock each other's blocks off. Unfortunately, the building turns out to be a hell of a lot more fun than the battle itself. Without any real depth to the fighting you'll get over it pretty quick.

LSWIII/TCW is technically superior to all previous LEGO games in every way bar the one thing that matters most: subject matter. We had difficulty getting enthused with the TV plots and the magic seen in the movie-based games is in short supply. The trademark LEGO humour just isn't as strong in this; we barely snorted blue milk out of our noses at all. Beyond those missing pieces, this is consistent enough to be plastic fantastic fun for all ages.  Adam Mathew

Final Say

PRESENTATION An improved engine that offers better lighting and more organic (cheatingly non-LEGO) levels.

SOUND All grunts and gibberish talk is provided by the actual cartoon actors. For all that's worth.

CONTROLS Sweet lightsaber combos are more satisfying. A dedicated block button wouldn't have gone astray.

REPLAY VALUE A Calamari cruiser's load of extras to unlock, plus two-player co-op and versus modes.

Verdict

Prettier, slicker and a bit deeper gameplay-wise. Still, a bit of a brick compared to the original trilogy.

8

de Blob 2

Some day we'll find it: the rainbow connection



Blob: the ultimate purple-headed warrior

Play this if you like

Colouring books

Info

FORMAT: PS3

GENRE: PLATFOR

RELEASE:

DISTRIBUTOR: THQ

DEVELOPER: BLUE TONGUE

PLAYERS: 1-2

RRP: \$79.95

Colouring-in is the kindergarten equivalent of crack. Teachers have long since known that getting you to paint within the lines equates to a big, stupid grin on your face and an hour's worth of drool on your shirt. *de Blob* 2 is a platformer that follows the exact same principle, but every now and then it betrays its 'busy work' nature.

As the titular Blob it's your job to roll about a soulless, whitewashed city and to bring it back to life by tagging it with technicolour. That's right kids, graffiti terrorism. Embrace it. The time allotted for this task is in abundance and your enemies can be swiftly dispatched with lock-on homing attacks. If that sounds super easy, that's because it super is. Regardless, *de Blob* 2 still manages to be a rare, almost therapeutic



Final Say

PRESENTATION Kaleidoscopic visuals and cutesy characters make for a whimsical wonderland.

SOUND Every level is its own cruisey jam session.

CONTROLS Lock-attacks can get out of control and Blob can be too slow.

REPLAY VALUE There's a misbalanced co-op mode and some decent enough multiplayer.

Verdict

It's stays simplistic for a bit too long, but given time it becomes as refreshing as a scratch 'n' sniff sticker.

8



Beyond Good & Evil HD

Are you achin' for some bacon?

Beyond Good & Evil HD is a time capsule choc-full of charm. It's still a real joy to guide plucky photojournalist Jade through a whimsical Wikileaks fraught with conspiracies, hovercraft shootouts, oppressive governments and alien invaders.

There's also something to be said for the unique setting; where humans co-exist with anthropomorphised animals, such as rasta rhino shopkeepers, bull bartenders and pig-men. Pig-men, Jerry. Pig-men.

Partnered up with your bacon buddy, Pey'j, the ultimate goal is to uncover and thwart an intergalactic plot using simple combat and light puzzling, a smattering of stealth, and a little photo-voyeurism. Getting your paparazzi on with a camera is an important mechanic of *BG&E* as Jade hopes to infiltrate secret government installations and collect evidence of shady dealings. In order to fund these shit-stirring Today Tonight antics you'll have

to undertake a National Geographic style sidequest that has you snapping local wildlife for cash. It's surprisingly addictive and sucks you into the world just that little bit more.

Cockblocking a conspiracy sounds like serious stuff but in reality it's all delivered with lighthearted, cartoonish visuals. Fortunately, this low-tech art direction has helped to preserve *BG&E* against what would ordinarily be a sizeable generation gap in visuals. But while the ravages of time have been kind and there has been some nips and tucks done, there's still no way a current-era gamer would mistake this HD update's simplistic textures and muppet voice synching for a new release title. That said, the remastered soundtrack fares much better in the remake stakes and is just as bonkers eclectic as ever.

There are still some legacy issues that plague *BG&E*. The camera system doesn't always hand over the reins to you and it



"The fetid stench of conspiracy is thick here, Pey'j" "Sorry Jade, that was me"



Play this if you like

Pig-men

Info

FORMAT: PS3
GENRE: ACTION ADVENTURE
RELEASE: NOW
DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT
PLAYERS: 1
RRP: \$19.95



As the comedy relief, Pey'j regularly harms it up

can be as stable as a cat tied to a vacuum cleaner when you walk into the wrong corner. Likewise, the original voice acting is acceptable at best, but a touch rough in some places and a might bit odd in others. A flamingly-effeminate Spanish man is our personal AI system? Really?

Also, the huge dungeons and metropolis areas are annoyingly divided into bite-sized levels that are book-ended by loading screens. Newer gamers will wonder why these old artefacts of design weren't lifted out, but they don't really seem to negatively affect the experience too much.

At the end of the day, *Beyond Good & Evil* still has all the hallmarks of a timeless classic. The watery planet of Hillys was deliberately built to match the quaintness of Hyrule, and yet there's a harder edge here that enables much deeper emotional attachment to the characters.

Even though this is a Spartan HD remake with sweet bugger all extras added, it's hard not to be seduced by the perfect-pacing, worthwhile exploration and the distinctly French story and setting. At such a low asking price this is absolutely worth revisiting if your copy has been lost to the sands of time. It's must-play material if you've never shot a government to death before (using only a camera). **Adam Mathew**

Final Say

PRESENTATION

Sharpened up and still pleasing to the eye. Lip-synch is still seriously oldschool and distracting.

SOUND Most of the voice acting that has stood the test of time. Lovely remastered soundtrack that is very eclectic.

CONTROLS Everything works pretty well. The lack of camera control can frustrate on occasion.

REPLAY VALUE Not much here to bring you back at all. There are leaderboards, but will anybody care about them?

Verdict

This aging flower has lost some of its beauty but none of its intelligence or charm.

8

Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together

A monstrously good time



Play this if you like

Valkyria Chronicles, Vagrant Story

Info

FORMAT: PSP

GENRE: RPG

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$69.95

You've probably looked at the genre and the screenshots, maybe at the score, and you're one of three types of people. Firstly, the type that's flicked the page over to Internet (in which case you have no idea what you're missing out on), or you're carefully poring through the mag soaking up every detail, or, finally, you just like to hear about great games.

Welcome. This is a great game, albeit a remake and tweak of a PSone game that's 16 years old. You pick your squad of nine characters and battle it out with enemy AI on a grid. The location and placement of your troops is critical to your success. If you have them in a square too close to the wrong enemy, or in an incoherent formation, you'll be punished for it – and the height difference in terrain alters

the strength of your attacks as well. It's not a game that can be easily dipped in and out of as battles can last for more than 20 minutes, but it works well on a handheld format.

Tactics Ogre is a handsome title and it's been suitably updated. Graphically it uses retro charm and modern wizardry for some lush effects, and a new feature allows you to rewind the battle by up to 50 turns in case you really mess up. The results of battle affect the story but you can go back to key points in the story to see how it would've panned out.

You need to persevere with *Tactics Ogre*. It is remarkably deep but we fear that it's going to go relatively unnoticed. Don't let this happen.

– Paul Taylor



Final Say

PRESENTATION

Impeccable. Excellent graphical effects and cut scenes.

SOUND A sweeping and at time emotional score through the magic of MIDI. Honest.

CONTROLS There's a lot to learn and the difficulty curve is steep.

REPLAY VALUE Near endless. You can tailor the game to play as you see fit.

9



The 3rd Birthday

March of the tentacles



We're still trying to unlock Aya's '3rd birthday suit' costume

Play this if you like

Parasite Eve 2, Resident Evil 5

Info

FORMAT: PSP

GENRE: ACTION

RELEASE: NOW

DISTRIBUTOR: UBISOFT

DEVELOPER: SQUARE

ENIX

PLAYERS: 1

RRP: \$69.95

In the opening sequence to *The 3rd Birthday*, leading lady Aya Brea faces up to a gigantic, city-destroying, people-mashing tentacle monster with a revolver. Sucks to be her, until you start the game and figure out you can implant her soul into soldier with better weapons.

The premise is that the tentacle creatures and their shuffling, flying and floating sidekicks, the Twisted, invaded Manhattan in 2013. Aya is recruited to go back in time and put a stop to it by sending her soul into the ether and taking over friendly soldiers and other humans that are caught up in the battle.

You're given a decent, upgradeable arsenal of guns to help, but some units have their own

special weapon unique to a situation.

When Aya leaps from body to body you'll see her in her clothes so you're not just flitting around to random people, and where these bodies are situated on the battlefield is crucial in some gunfights. Indeed, while she starts in a horror-movie clingy tanktop you can dress her up in various threads to improve her defences. As well as taking over human bodies, she can also implant herself into a nasty and explode them from the inside. There's a fair amount of spraying claret, both in-game and throughout the lush cutscenes.

While this is mostly a third-person action title there are strong RPG elements as well, as Aya's DNA can be altered to increase her defences, attack power etc and it turns the game from being pretty but bland into a pretty and gripping must-play. Sticking points include archaic level design, cheap enemy attacks and patchy camera controls (hurry up, NPG) but it's definitely a fun blast. – Paul Taylor



Final Say

PRESENTATION Near faultless. Generic enemies spoil the experience somewhat.

SOUND Aya grunts and shrieks repetitively but the music's clever and effective in creating atmosphere.

CONTROLS As you'd expect: a bit frustrating. Get your Monster Hunter claw working and you'll be ok.

REPLAY VALUE Limited. You can alter Aya's DNA but the core experience remains the same.

7

Verdict

Good bordering great – we wish we were playing it with twin sticks – but definitely worth checking out. Solid action.

internet

NEWS, DLC,
REVIEWS

► WHAT'S NEW

PSN DEVELOPMENTS

What you can expect to see and play on the PSN

As we revealed last month, Sony recently launched Music Unlimited, powered by Qriocity, a service that can stream music to your PS3, computer or other Sony home entertainment devices – in time it'll even land on Sony Android phones. If you haven't already seen it, go to the 'Music' icon on your PS3's XMB and find the Qriocity icon. You'll get 30 days free to trial the Premium service.

Coming soon to your PS3 (and other Sony devices) is Video On Demand, a service that will stream videos. There's no word on a release date for Australia, however it's currently available in Japan, the US, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK – Australia and New Zealand won't be far behind.

Studios confirmed so far include Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Warner Bros. and Walt Disney Studios. It joins the video store that's currently part of the PSN, and also MUBI, which has a vast library of arthouse and limited release films. The main point of difference is that Video On Demand will be available on a multitude of Sony devices, but we're yet to see the content and, importantly, pricing. If it follows in suit to Music Unlimited it will also be able to recommend movies that suit your taste.

Also available for Android phones and iPhone is the PlayStation app that allows you to sign in to the PSN and check out your friends' Trophies, browse the PSN Store and also check out the PlayStation blog. It's still early days yet, but the app has huge potential. Go to your respective online phone stores and download it.



Androids: cute and functional today, your unquestioned lord and master tomorrow

PlayStation Plus users have another reason to feel smug, and those yet to jump on board have reason to try the premium service: games saves can now be uploaded to other consoles.

Instead of carting your console over to a friend's house to play a game you can now upload your save games using your PSN ID. There's 150MB of space available – good for up to 1000 saves – though any copy protected save data can only be accessed 24 hours on a different machine after initially uploading.

Finally, PSN Plus Subscribers can expect these offers during April. As usual, it's not the final list and at time of going to print it's pretty light but with the promise that it'll fill out by the time you're reading this. Check online now for more.

PSN:

- *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* – New to PSN and two weeks exclusive to Plus (includes Trophy support)
- *Prince of Persia Classic*
- PSone: *Creature 3: Raised in Space*
- minis: *Dual Invaders*
- *Dynogems*
- Exclusive discounts: TBC
- Dynamic themes: Exclusive Abstract Art Theme, Exclusive Growing Garden Theme

VIDZONE CHANNEL SPOTLIGHT

THIS MONTH: Triple J Hottest 100



OU EST LE SWIMMING POOL - DANCE THE WAY I FEEL

There are some clever kids with ingenious clips and catchy riffs ideal for TV shows...



MARK RONSON - THE BIKE SONG

...while Ronson mobilises his own bike army. There's an artful transformation sequence to make you smile...



TWO DOOR CINEMA CLUB - I CAN TALK

...but the chaps in Two Door Cinema Club use cinematic magic and lose their heads in this punchy number. Magic.

VidZone is the largest online music video VOD service in the world, and it's available free on PS3. Download the vidzone application and you'll have access to over 13,000 music videos at the push of a button!



PlayStation® Network

ESSENTIAL DOWNLOADS



ALIEN BREED 3: DESCENT

The final part in the twin-stick shooter trilogy and it's the best of the bunch. For less than \$15 you can do far worse than this. Also has co-op so you can blast in a gruesome twosome.



F:NV - DEAD MONEY

This expansion to *New Vegas* focuses on stealth and hand-to-hand combat, and also tosses in a bunch of new enemies in this tense episode. Well thought out and good value, too.



DJ HERO 2 - PENDULUM

It's a thrill seeing this Perth-born (now UK-based) drum and bass band in a game. Their music's an apt fit for the genre and this is a sound and varied collection of their pulse-raising tracks.



PIXELJUNK SHOOTER 2

More than more of the same, yet veterans of the first will feel very comfortable going back in. More toys, more levels, and a thumping soundtrack are all part of the polished package.



BACK TO THE FUTURE

For just under \$30 you get to play out a story that'll never be made into a movie. Utterly charming, if a little short, the next four parts (included in the price) ought to make this a keeper.

WHAT IS PSN?

The PlayStation Network (PSN) is free to join and free to play. No subscription is required to play online. You'll be able to communicate with friends, access the PlayStation Store and download demos, add-ons, trailers, PSN games, PSone classics and blockbuster movies!



PlayStation® Network

GENRE: RACING RELEASE: NOW DISTRIBUTOR: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
DEVELOPER: EDEN GAMES PLAYERS: 1-8 RRP: \$99.95

Multiplayer > Test Drive Unlimited 2

No stops signs, no speed limits

As we mentioned in our review last issue, the amount of stuff to do in *Test Drive Unlimited 2* outstrips the game's production values. The two islands of Ibiza and Oahu are a technical coup, and despite the ropey car handling in the lower classes, once you get a machine and upgrade it you have more chance of enjoying what you're doing rather than cursing it.

Players have been cursing dodgy connections but a recent patch has made amends and the first planned paid-DLC pack is now set to be provided free (the Exploration pack will unlock the Lancia Stratos version Rallye and 1969 Dodge Charger) to sweeten the inconvenience caused. If you were put off and shelved the game now's a good time to get it back out.

It's possible to make your own

races for others to take part in, as well as a few multiplayer modes – with both, some are good, some are abysmal. You'll get the most out of this by forming a Club with your mates and racing around the islands making your own fun. It's stupid laughs rather than serious racing that'll draw you in to Eden's fantasy world, and getting online will also rack up the Community points to bulk out your profile.

This is definitely the best way to play *TDU2*.

VERDICT

More appealing in multiplayer than going solo, but the spirit of the game is best ignored in favour of making your own fun.



The tune being hummed by third place: *Help Me, Zonda*



GENRE: FIGHTING RELEASE: NOW DISTRIBUTOR: THQ DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PLAYERS: 1-2 RRP: \$109.95

Multiplayer > Marvel vs. Capcom 3

Scraping online in a retina-destroying lightshow

When everything's running sweetly online, *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* is a riot. You just can't be too fussy about it. Capcom has honed the mechanics of its online systems to a point where it's easy to accept or initiate a quick game but, while we've played through arcade mode with the option for players to challenge us, we've remained uninterrupted.

The simplest way to get scrapping with an opponent is to leave all your options to 'any' and hit search. Though Capcom has implemented a region search to make matches as speedy and lag-free as possible there's been a number of times we've searched and searched again with no results when we've locked it to Australia. Same thing applied when we've tried to keep it locked to our rank.

We've also met the lobby system with crunched eyebrows, as when you're not fighting you're watching other boxes that represent other players bouncing around and knocking into each other. This needs to be a better system where everyone's involved or can watch a match as it's progressing. It's quite dull otherwise; something *MVC3* certainly shouldn't be.

Still, when it's working it's glorious. You just need to do as your opponent does and roll with the punches.

VERDICT

It's easy to get into a game and be utterly thrashed if you just search for anyone to fight. The lobbies are a bit of a bust, however.



BEST GAMES TO PLAY ONLINE



CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

DEVELOPER: TROYARCH
PLAYERS: 1-16

Take *MW2*, and add in some insanely addictive contracts and inventive modes in the multiplayer proper. However, we especially like playing Zombies with a skilled compatriot.



RED DEAD REDEMPTION

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN
DIEGO PLAYERS: 1-16

The connection issues that bothered us are well and truly fixed, so there's no excuse not to jump on, form a posse and start hunting for challengers. Much better as a co-op experience.



SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PLAYERS: 1-4

It's like being in the arcades (remember those?) when you had a bunch of lads and lasses hanging around, marvelling at your quarter-circle technique. Champagne gaming.



FIFA 11

DEVELOPER: EA SPORTS
PLAYERS: 1-22

Shooters aren't the only games that need explicit tactics, and the beautiful game is remarkably brilliant with 11 versus 11 matches. It's still as compelling and smooth as last year's effort. Get on it right now.



BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

DEVELOPER: DICE
PLAYERS: 1-16

You'll be won over by the chaotic destruction and storming in to an enemy base on the back of a quad bike. You'll stay for the tactics. Team matches have little room for lone wolves.

Look Leo! The sum of the square roots of any two sides of this isosceles triangle is equal to the square root of the remaining side". "That's a right triangle, you idiot!"



GENRE: ACTION RELEASE: NOW PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL PLAYERS: 1-8 RRP: \$19.95

DLC >

Assassin's Creed Brotherhood The Da Vinci Disappearance

Backstab to the Future: Part 3

Leonardo Da Vinci was one of the most interesting characters in *Assassin's Creed II* but his screen time was cut right back in *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*. This sucked because Da Vinci was the Lucius Fox to Ezio's Batman; his curious absence meant a drop in the amount of wonderful toys to wield. As the more perceptive of you may have already gathered, Da Vinci is back in this DLC but he's also... not. Look, it's complicated.

Everybody's favourite egghead makes an initial appearance only to be nabbed by an underground cult. As Ezio it's up to you to leave no bro behind, to cloak yourself in the world's most obvious assassin uniform and engage various "Recovered Memories" on your map.

The majority of these missions are never-before-seen locations and they tend to rely on insta-fail-if-you're-spotted sneaking tasks. There's also a bit of a brainwork that involves an Easter egg hunt for certain paintings and then decipher the hidden messages within them. Last but not least, there are a number of platform focused missions that are a nice change of pace in that they require a bit more finesse than haphazardly hewing your way through enemy hoards.

All told this is a decent eight mission extension to the single-player experience, but it isn't especially revelatory and

roughly two hours of gameplay is barely enough to whet your blade.

On the multiplayer front there is a brand new map for the stab-happy and it's fashioned after the Alhambra Palace. You also get four new characters to play as, two brand new game modes, plus the cheapskates who didn't buy the Limited Codex Edition get all those extras too. The characters are Dama Rossa, Knight, Marquis and the Pariah and this rogues gallery offers some much needed variety to the crowds and they come with brand new kill animations too.

The additional game modes include Assassinate and Escort. Assassinate is a free-for-all that is absolute chaos. Escort on the other hand requires shrewd team work to not only protect a VIP, but to do it in such a way as to not betray the identity of the person you're hoping to protect.

The Da Vinci Disappearance is a very respectable piece of content, offering a decent campaign memory and a bunch of worthwhile additions to the multiplayer experience. If you do decide not to pick up the DLC you won't be missing out on any blow-your-mind plot points, but it's entertaining regardless. Like all *Assassin's Creed* narratives before it, this just hands you yet another open-ended question to further mess with your noodle.

Adam Mathew

"This sucked because Leonardo Da Vinci was the Lucius Fox to Ezio Auditore's Batman"

VERDICT

At the risk of incriminating ourselves, we must say "paid Escort action for the win". Get this DLC in your sights and take it out.



"Uh, oh. Somebody's been having second desserts" *Power slap*



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► THE LORD IS OUR SHEPARD

Our Favourite Celebrity Shepards

We all love that we can create our own face in *Mass Effect 2*. But did you know that the game generates a 'face code' to let you share your Shepard with the world? We've gone hunting for the coolest Commanders out there. If you want to share your Shepard take a pic and drop it on our Facebook page!



▲ Obama Shepard

Face code: 121.1FP.JJW.W31.H9R.2BL.
CV1.77W.EKA.561.157.6

This actually makes more sense than you think. Obama is notorious for cameoing in a crapload of comics and other media. Case in point: Barrack the Barbarian (he fights an Amazon version of Sarah Palin). He's also fist-bumped Spider-Man. Clearly your precious canon and continuity mean squat to this president. And really, if you're going into a suicide mission, you'll want a positive leader. Can we defeat The Collectors, Shepard? "Yes we can!"



▲ John "Locke" Shepard

Face code: 633.dwj.9wn.131.vma.p41.
uau.37w.6v1.1q8.134.5

It's like *Lost*... in space. But it certainly won't be like the cruddy '60s TV show of the same name (what with its seriously creepy Dr. Smith and that stupid arm-flailing robot). No sir, when you reconstruct your Shepard's face to look like John Locke, the chances of being a suicide mission 'survivor' could skyrocket. Conversely, having him aboard the Normandy might be the ultimate jinx: homeboy has a habit of being on flights that crashed horribly. Best of luck there.



▲ Arnie Shepard

Face code: 541.WJH.CKF.A3A.
FLV.85W.W1K.2WV.6K1.8L2.145.4

[Shepard gives a "man-shake" greeting to a crewmember] "What's the matter Jacob? Has Cerberus got you pushing too many pen-cils?". For the best Arnie effect we recommend you play through as a pure Renegade. That way Arnie Shepard will get a cracked face and some eerie, Terminator-looking eyes. Should any passersby ask what is wrong with your on-screen character's face, feel free to respond thusly: "It's not a too-mour"

► WHAT ABOUT MY PRIME, MICK?

Fight Night Champion

Your four-step guide to dethroning the ice-cold champion



Step 1 ► Look, we know how you're feeling at this point; you want to knock Frost's block off. Try that if you want your head caved in. To survive these first two rounds you'll have to basically block and run. Do not try to get cheeky punches in. Do not get caught in a corner. Be aware that any combinations he lands will open up your block. Move closer and then back right off.

Step 2 ► Gus figures out that attacking Frost's stamina is the key to victory. Easy for him to say, from the other side of the ropes. Don't wig out when you see that you have to hit him 75 times in the guts. Those 75 hits are across three rounds – you've got plenty time. If you're lagging for hits, try to get a lot in the last 10 seconds of the round. If you do get stunned you can be saved by the bell.

Step 3 ► In the fifth round you'll automatically receive cut above your right eye. Don't try to fight it, it's all part of the script. The second you get back to your corner Gus will tell you that the corner crew can fix it up if you can go two rounds without taking a certain amount of hits. You're basically looking at the same strategy as step 1: stay the hell away from him and do not release that block button.

Step 4 ► Round 8 is the absolute earliest you can win this fight. From this point on just box your own style and, once he's stunned, cave his smug face in with some hurtin' bombs. You'll only need to knock Frost out once to get the title; keeping him at bay for the first seven rounds and knocking the air out of his lungs has left him weak-legged and vulnerable.

► WIN FRIENDS AND NAIL PEOPLE IN

Dragon Age II

Gift giving in *Dragon Age II* will allow you to get closer to your companions (and, in four cases, into their pantaloons as well). Unfortunately, the game isn't like real life; you can't just rip some posies out of the ground, give them a sly "how you doin'?" and witness +10 horniness. Hunting for that special item can improve your odds.



◀ Fenris ♥

A Slave's Life

Location: Lowtown (Act 2)

Tip: Ensure that you enter this area at night time. The A Slave's Life can be obtained from the sack in Eleven Alienage (at night).

Blade of Mercy

Location: Secret Meeting Place (Act 3)

Tip: Can be done while doing the quest "Best Served Cold". After deciding whether to kill Spoiley McSpoiler it's in a chest nearby.

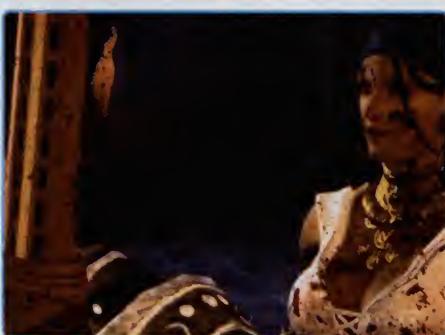


◀ Merrill ♥

Wooden Halla Carving

Location: Ilen Craft's Shop (Act 2)

Tip: Stop being tight-fisted, whip out your dragon-skinned wallet and purchase it. Nobody said scoring extra "companionship" was cheap.



◀ Isabela ♥

Ship In A Bottle

Location: Smuggler's Cut

Tip: Scored while doing the quest, "Black Powder Courtesy". Near the exit of the Smuggler's Cave, don't forget to get it from the nearby chest.

Riyaini Talisman

Location: Ilen Craft's Shop

Tip: This is a purchasable trinket; just pony up the currency.



◀ Anders ♥

Tevinter Chantry Amulet

Location: Abandoned Slaver Den

Tip: Locate and undertake Fenris' personal quest called "A Bitter Pill". Keep an eye out for a box containing this fancy Chantry bling-bling.

Sebastian

Starkhaven Longbow

Location: Harlmann Estate

Tip: Can be done while doing the quest, "Repentance". Look around carefully for this item inside the Estate.

Aveline

Shield Of The Knight Herself

Location: Ser Varnell's Refuge (Act 2)

Tip: Do "Offered and Lost" and find it in a chest.

Keep the siblings happy as well...

Carver ▶

Torbius' Documents

Location: Amell Estate Cellar

Tip: Attempt the "Birthright" quest with Carver in the party. Visit the store room area and loot the chest. Note: this is a missable item.

Bethany ▶

Portrait of Your Mother

Location: At the Amell Estate Cellar

Tip: To earn the eternal gratitude of your sister you can find a picture of "mumsy" while doing the quest "Birthright".



► MUST WATCH

Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows: Part 1

(M)

DIRECTOR: DAVID YATES **CAST:** DANIEL RADCLIFFE, EMMA WATSON, RUPERT GRINT, TOM FELTON, HELENA BONHAM CARTER, RALPH FIENNES, ALAN RICKMAN, BONNIE WRIGHT **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

Let's get one thing straight: we think that stretching one book across two movies is a dodgy brothers approach to concluding a movie series. As you might expect, *Deathly Hallows* feels far too long a build up, even though there is a wonderful mix of dark drama with lighter comedy throughout.

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 is the first entry of the franchise to really capture the essence of J.K. Rowling's masterworks. That said, this film's satisfaction is stunted by the fact that it's just a warm-up to a separate main event.

Watch this if you like any and all of the Harry Potter books

Verdict

A good deal grittier and grimmer than what has gone before. But hey, that's the way J.K. Rowling wrote it in the first place.

8



Heat

(MA15+)

DIRECTOR: MICHAEL MANN **CAST:** AL PACINO, ROBERT DE NIRO, VAL KILMER **AVAILABLE:** (OWN) \$12.99, 2070MB (SD)

Heat is a thrilling psychological drama about a brilliant thief and a detective obsessed whose fates become intertwined in the aftermath of a botched securities heist.

This also marked the first time since *The Godfather Part II* that acting juggernauts Pacino and De Niro share the same screen. Though the both deliver remarkable characterisations, they unfortunately only share but a handful of screen minutes together. Nevertheless, *Heat* is an engrossing crime drama that draws compelling

performances from its all star cast. This is the film that confirmed Michael Mann's mastery of the genre.

Watch this if you like *Kane & Lynch*

Verdict Lengthy for its time, *Heat* really does get better with every subsequent watch.

9

PlayStation® Store

► TOP TEN

Movies on Demand



- 1 **Salt** Sony
- 2 **Despicable Me** Universal
- 3 **Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'hoole** Warner Bros.
- 4 **Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps** Fox
- 5 **Going the Distance** New Line
- 6 **Thor: Hammer of the Gods** Universal
- 7 **Centurion** Hopscotch
- 8 **Wrong Turn 3** Fox
- 9 **The Sorcerer's Apprentice** Disney
- 10 **The Karate Kid** Sony

Now available to rent or own on PlayStation® Store

The PlayStation Network Video Store offers hundreds of titles available to rent or own at the click of a button!



The King's Speech (M)

DIRECTOR: TOM HOOPER **CAST:** COLIN FIRTH, HELENA BONHAM CARTER, GEOFFREY RUSH **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

This is the Academy Award-winning true story of King George VI of Britain, his impromptu ascension to the throne and the speech therapist who helped the unsure monarch become worthy of it.

After the scandalous abdication of King Edward VIII (Guy Pearce), Bertie (Colin Firth) who has suffered from a debilitating speech impediment all his life, is suddenly crowned King George VI of England. With his country on the brink of World War II and in desperate need of a leader, an eccentric Australian speech therapist, Lionel Logue (Geoffrey Rush) is brought in.

Firth and Rush put in masterful performances in this predictable but stylishly produced and rousing period drama. Believe the hype, go and see it.

Watch this if you like bloody good Aussie acting

Verdict A compelling period drama with witty dialogue that stutters exactly when it means to.

9



The Incredibles (PG)

DIRECTOR: BRAD BIRD **CAST:** CRAIG T. NELSON, HOLLY HUNTER, SAMUEL L. JACKSON **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

Once one of the world's top masked crime fighters, Bob Parr – known to all as "Mr. Incredible" – fought evil and saved lives on a daily basis. But 15 years later Bob and his wife – a famous superhero in her own right – have adopted civilian identities and retreated to the suburbs to live normal lives with their three kids. Now he's a clock-punching insurance claims adjuster fighting boredom and a bulging waistline. Itching to get back into action, Bob gets his chance when a mysterious benefactor recognises his abilities and offers him a job.

Noticeably more violent and a bit harder edged than most Pixar offerings, *The Incredibles* does a great job of lampooning the lives of super heroes and suburban zeroes alike. Switch into your super suit (no capes!) and scoop up this must-watch material, today. It's beautiful on Blu-ray.

Watch this if you like comics and superb animation

Verdict One of Pixar's best efforts and that's saying something. Hurry up and make us a sequel already.

9



Little Fockers (M)

DIRECTOR: PAUL WEITZ **CAST:** BEN STILLER, ROBERT DE NIRO, OWEN WILSON, BLYTHE DANNER, TERI POLO, JESSICA ALBA, DUSTIN HOFFMAN, BARBRA STREISAND, HARVEY KEITEL **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

It has taken 10 years, two little Fockers with wife Pam and countless hurdles for Greg to finally get "in" with his tightly wound father-in-law, Jack. After the cash-strapped dad takes a job moonlighting for a drug company, however, Jack's suspicions about his favourite male nurse come roaring back. The situation escalates when Pam's lovelorn ex, Kevin (Owen Wilson) descends for the twins' birthday party.

Unfortunately it's the same tired old formula as Greg must prove to the skeptical Jack that he's fully capable as the man of the house and ready to become the family's next patriarch. Even with such a wide array of talented actors attached to the movie, *Little Fockers* breaks the circle of trust by rehashing the same old jokes that just weren't that funny to begin with.

Watch this if you like watching ships, sinking fast

Verdict This is a disjointed, fairly unfunny mess that will have you reaching for the fucking receipt.

2



My Neighbours: The Yamadas (PG)

DIRECTOR: ISAO TAKAHATA **CAST:** JAMES BELUSHI, A.J. BUCKLEY, DIXIE CARTER **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

The Yamadas are a typical middle class Japanese family living in urban Tokyo and this film shows us a variety of episodes of their lives. With tumultuous tales that range from the humourous to the heartbreaking, we see this family cope with life's little conflicts, problems and joys in their own way.

As Ghibli fans we initially came away disappointed with the minimalist art style and lack of a contiguous story. But while Takahata draws out his fantasy a bit longer than is necessary this still packs fantastic animation, and a pleasant, upbeat Saturday comics-style humour. It's just a shame that the random antics of the Yamadas don't come with much of a point.

Watch this if you like anything from the Studio Ghibli stable of animation

Verdict Pretty and charming but too long in places and the stories don't really go anywhere.

6



Tron: Legacy (PG)

DIRECTOR: JOSEPH KOSINSKI **CAST:** JEFF BRIDGES, GARRETT HEDLUND, OLIVIA WILDE, BRUCE BOXLEITNER, JAMES FRAIN, BEAU GARRETT, MICHAEL SHEEN, ANIS CHEURFA, SERINDA SWAN, CONRAD COATES, DAFT PUNK **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund), is haunted by the mysterious disappearance of his father Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges, a.k.a. The Dude abiding), a man once known as the world's leading videogame developer. When Sam investigates a strange signal sent from the old Flynn's Arcade – a signal that could only come from his father – he finds himself pulled into a digital world where Kevin has been trapped for 20 years. With the help of the fearless warrior Quorra (Olivia Wilde), father and son embark on a life-or-death journey across a cyber world.

As a sequel this captures enough of the original to be faithful but is bold enough to expand into new territory. Viewing this in 3D will hit you like a slap in the face, however prolonged exposure to this piss-weak plot will leave you wanting to slap yourself again. Hard.

Watch this if you like your eyeballs seduced

Verdict A stunning ocular and aural assault, although it's all style and not much substance.

7



Megamind (PG)

DIRECTOR: TOM MCGRATH **CAST:** WILL FERRELL, BRAD PITT, TINA FEY, JONAH HILL, DAVID CROSS, JUSTIN THEROUX, BEN STILLER, JESSICA SCHULTE, TOM MCGRATH, EMILY NORDWIND, J.K. SIMMONS **AVAILABLE ON:** BLU-RAY, DVD

Megamind is the most brilliant super villain ever known, and the least successful. Over the years Megamind has tried to conquer Metro City in every imaginable way. Each attempt has been a colossal failure thanks to the caped superhero known as "Metro Man" (Pitt), at least until Megamind (Ferrell) actually defeats him in the throes of one of his botched evil plans. However, when the fate of Metro City is threatened by a new villain, Megamind must role-switch to save the day.

DreamWorks Animation has essentially crossbred *Despicable Me* with *The Incredibles*, but the result isn't as clever a take on the genre as the latter was. Even still, this is consistently chuckle-worthy and well-paced fun.

Watch this if you like Kung Fu Panda, *The Incredibles*

Verdict Dialogue drawing from improvisation between Ferrell and Fey is always going to work.

8

► MUST WATCH

Paul

(MA15+)

DIRECTOR: GREG MOTTOLA **CAST:** SIMON PEGG, NICK FROST, KRISTEN WIIG, SETH ROGEN, JASON BATEMAN **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

Graeme (Pegg) and Clive (Frost) are two British sci-fi nerds travelling the US, checking out iconic locations where aliens have (supposedly) landed. After going to Comic-Con in San Diego they make their way to Area 51, where they pick up an unlikely hitch-hiker Paul (Rogen), a foul-mouthed, party-hard alien.

It's a dream come true but also a nightmare for the bumbling duo, and their friendship is tested due to Paul's intrusive ways, and also by outrunning a trio of Federal agents led by the ice cold Zool (Bateman) who are trying to re-capture Paul.

If you cut out the swearing, drugs and the very bloody end sequence Paul could be a film for kids – it feels pretty childish in places from the humour to the simplistic relationships between the characters. It takes a long time to warm up as well, and the laughs only get going about half way through but it relies too much on out-of-character outbursts: Wiig's character transformation from an ultra-religious nut to nihilistic hussy is the film's main offender.

While Pegg and Frost wrote this it's missing their usual charm. There's no subtle Brit humour in here and while the two are still a watchable duo, it's Rogen as Paul who generates the most giggles – he's extraordinarily well-animated and believable.

Of course, it relies a lot on other films about aliens – brush up on your pop knowledge of *E.T.*, *Alien*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* before you see this – and there's a peculiar cameo at the end that'll make anyone over the age of 25 smile. Pegg, Frost, we know you can do better.

Watch this if you like *Shaun of the Dead*



It's Rogen as Paul who generates the most giggles



You've got red on you

Battle Los Angeles

DIRECTOR: JONATHAN LIEBESMAN **CAST:** AARON ECKHART, MICHELLE RODRIGUEZ, BRIDGET MOYNAHAN, NE-YO **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

scar nomination season is over, and you can tell by the mind-numbing popcorn flicks coming to cinema. *Battle Los Angeles* is as undemanding as they come, relying on your appreciation of seeing big explosions and burly Marine hoo-rahsing into a manly camaraderie as they blast their way through Transformers-like aliens in a big city.

Aliens have landed around the globe, attacking coastal cities. Marine Staff Sergeant Nantz (Eckhart) is called back into duty, leading a group of men who must save Santa Monica before it's bombed to bits by the military. And that's about as strenuous as the plot gets.

We don't find out anything meaningful about

the aliens, nor is there any tension. It's mostly military chatter shouted through the gunfire and terrific explosions, rampant American nationalism that demonstrates that even in the face of a terrifying enemy The Good Guys still win. We wish it had some spectacular production values but you've seen all the effects before, and better.

In a way it's the stereotypically perfect movie for gamers hooked on shooters, but without the thrill of being in control. However if you had a blockbuster game like this you'd feel cheated that you're wasting your time on it (though there is a PSN game adaptation coming, see p62). While it's smashing the box office in the US save this for a rainy Sunday afternoon or wait until it hits Blu-ray.



They'll adjust you too. Right in the face

The Adjustment Bureau

(M)
DIRECTOR: GEORGE NOLFI **CAST:** MATT DAMON, EMILY BLUNT **IN CINEMAS:** NOW

Based on a book by Philip K. Dick is this romantic sci-fi that questions whether fate exists, and what we can do to change it. David Norris (Damon) is an up and coming politician in New York. However, after *The New York Post* prints risqué photos of him from his past his career is thrown into chaos.

Norris then meets Elise Sellas (Blunt) in the bathroom of a hotel. She's running from hotel security after crashing a party, they see something in each other that they like but she's evicted by security before much can come of it.

However, the Adjusters, a mysterious group of men in trilbies who are dedicated to ensuring the two don't meet again, planned their initial contact. The two of them cross paths again and the plot takes off.

While it's clunky in parts and with suspect plot holes this is still a charmer. Damon and Blunt are electric on screen and the way the Adjusters can flit around the city will leave you happily puzzled. Recommended.



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index

ACTION

50 Cent: Blood on the Sand 7
SWORDFISH STUDIOS
So dumb it's dangerously good. Better than it sounds.

Army of Two 7
EA MONTREAL
Solid co-op thrills make up for its wasted potential.

Army of Two: The 40th Day 7
EA MONTREAL
Still bone-headed but a lot tighter and more fun than the first.

Avatar 7
UBISOFT MONTREAL
If you've got a 3D TV, buy it. If not, it's too derivative to bother.

RECOMMENDED Bayonetta 9
PLATINUM GAMES
It takes balls to make a game this violent, sexy and weird.

Bionic Commando 7
GRIN
There are some great moments, but they're few and far between.

The Bourne Conspiracy 7
HIGH MOON STUDIOS
Great presentation and vibe, samey action. Stylish, superficial.

The Club 8
BIZARRE CREATIONS
Original, compulsive and fun.

Damnation 3
BLUE OMEGA ENTERTAINMENT
Uninspired level design, broken gameplay.

Dark Sector 7
DIGITAL EXTREMES
Solid but hardly perfect.

Dark Void 6
AIRTIGHT GAMES
Uninspiring graphics, lacklustre sound and dull, dull combat.



DEAD RISING 2 9
DEVELOPER: BLUE CASTLE GAMES
PUBLISHER: THQ PLAYERS: 1-4

"You'll wear a stupid grin pretty much from start to finish and it's a riot in co-op. A must-play. The satisfaction of literally cutting down thousands of zombies with anything you can pick up is its only hook - but it works a treat."

Dead to Rights: Retribution 6
VOLATILE GAMES
Fine, but doesn't do enough to stand out. Needs more dog.

Devil May Cry 4 7
CAPCOM
Memorable bosses but too much backtracking spoils things.

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard 6
VICIOUS CYCLE SOFTWARE
Great concept and nice parody, but basic one-play stuff.

ABOUT THE INDEX

Check out our handy index of all the PS3 titles we feel you should play (and some you shouldn't). Please note: scores are a reflection of a game's comparative quality at the time of release and will not change - but the index may be updated as titles age or are superseded by new games.

Front Mission Evolved
DOUBLE HELIX GAMES
Likable but limited mech-based combat.

Genji: Days of the Blade 5
GAME REPUBLIC
Flashy graphics, giant enemy crabs, piss-poor plodding gameplay.

RECOMMENDED Ghostbusters: The Video Game 9
TERMINAL REALITY / THREEWAVE SOFTWARE
Robust, charming and impeccably presented.

Iron Man 3
SECRET LEVEL
Filled to the brim with bugs. Substandard.

John Woo Presents: Stranglehold 7
MIDWAY CHICAGO
Packs frantic Max Payne-lite fun.



JUST CAUSE 2 9
DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE STUDIOS
PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
PLAYERS: 1

"Parachutes. Grappling hooks. Stripper zeppelins. Why don't you already own this game? If you can dream it, you can do it in this insane action game."

Kane & Lynch: Dead Men 6
IO INTERACTIVE
A let down. Gets close to greatness before crashing back down.

Kane & Lynch 2: Dog Days 7
IO INTERACTIVE
Michael Mann/YouTube visuals? Great. The game? Average.

Lost Planet: Extreme Condition 6
CAPCOM / K2 LLC
A half-assed port you'd never bother with.

Lost Planet 2 7
CAPCOM
Slim pickings for solo players but multiplayer buffs may dig it.

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames 8
PANDEMIC STUDIOS
Weak in many areas but has fun in spades. *The Saboteur* does it better, though.

Mobile Suit Gundam: Target in Sight 3
NAMCO BANDAI
A rubber Godzilla of a title. What a pipe blocker!

A new Lowe



Ninja Gaiden Sigma
TEAM NINJA
A treasure trove of gaming goodness. And violence.

RECOMMENDED Ninja Gaiden Sigma 2
TEAM NINJA
A sexy and rock hard title but the gore's been cut.

RECOMMENDED Prototype
RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
A simple superhero kill-fest but a truckload of guilty fun.

RECOMMENDED Red Faction: Guerrilla
VOLITION, INC.
The best destruction effects ever, hands down.

Saints Row 2
VOLITION, INC.
Puerile, mean-spirited and technically outclassed, if you care.

SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs Confrontation 6
SLANT SIX GAMES
A sturdy effort that fails to excite.

Terminator Salvation
GRIN / HALCYON GAMES
An abysmal failure. Short, filled with glitches.

Time Crisis: Razing Storm
NAMCO
Simple, short light gun fare. Ignore the new first-person shooter mode, it's awful.

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2
RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT
A tense, realistic shooter. Cool gadgets.

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen
LUXOFUX
A day of undemanding fun but no more.

Transformers: War for Cybertron
HIGH MOON
Good multiplayer, and that's about it.

RECOMMENDED Vanquish
PLATINUM GAMES
Whip quick third-person thrills. Play it now.

Wanted: Weapons of Fate
GRIN
Designed only to appeal to mentally-subnormal 11-year-olds.

RECOMMENDED Warhawk
INCOGNITO ENTERTAINMENT / SCS SANTA MONICA STUDIO
Furiously addictive. Tighter than a bull's arse on fight night.

WET
A2M
Tonnes of grindhouse style, little substance.

Wheelman
MIDWAY STUDIOS - NEWCASTLE / TIGON STUDIOS
Rubbish low-speed handling and underdone throughout.

Once upon a time, *Leisure Suit Larry* had a reputation for being a mischievous game with a lovable loser as its protagonist. Now it's just crass, broken and reviled. The creator of Larry, Al Lowe, had nothing to do with *Box Office Bust*. On his website he thanked Team 17 for not sending him a review copy.

X-Men Origins: Wolverine
RAVEN SOFTWARE
A head slicin' chest beater of a slash 'em up.

ACTION-ADVENTURE

3D Dot Game Heroes
FROM SOFTWARE
If you pine for the past this should keep you entertained.

Majin and the Forsaken Kingdom 7
GAME REPUBLIC
A feel-good romp that's a little old-fashioned.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed
UBISOFT MONTREAL
A landmark, though slightly dated now.

RECOMMENDED Assassin's Creed II
UBISOFT MONTREAL
When everything gels correctly it casually murders its predecessor.

ESSENTIAL Assassin's Creed Brotherhood
UBISOFT MONTREAL
The pinnacle of the series so far, and the multiplayer is outstanding.

RECOMMENDED Batman: Arkham Asylum
ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
Really delivers the goods. Best Batman game ever. Best superhero game full stop.

RECOMMENDED Brütal Legend
DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS
Must play. If God gave rock 'n' roll to us then it's settled: Tim Schafer is God.

RECOMMENDED Castlevania: Lords of Shadow
MERCURY STEAM
Easily one of the best games of 2010.

Clash of the Titans 4
GAME REPUBLIC
A piss-poor action game lacking in every way.

RECOMMENDED Dante's Inferno
VISCELAR GAMES
Derivative but well-produced and good fun.

RECOMMENDED Darksiders
VIGIL GAMES
It'll test your patience but persevere and your satisfaction will swell.

RECOMMENDED Dead Space
EA REDWOOD SHORES
Super tense. The future of survival horror.

RECOMMENDED Dead Space 2
VISCELAR GAMES
What it loses in isolation it makes up for in storytelling. Still scary.

Demon's Souls
FROM SOFTWARE
Those looking for an extreme challenge may have met their match.

RECOMMENDED Enslaved
NINJA THEORY
A fun platforming romp based on the same classic story as TV's *Monkey* was.

Fairytale Fights
PLAYLOGIC GAME FACTORY
Quirky and sadistic but too simplistic.

Folklore
GAME REPUBLIC
Original and surprising with moments of genius.

The Godfather: The Don's Edition
EA REDWOOD SHORES
It made for a decent PS2 game but skip this port. It's not worth it.

Engaging warp speed

As well as providing the voice of the narrator in *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*, Patrick Stewart has flexed his tonsils for another 19 videogames since 1994. The very first was a special edition of a MS-DOS game, *Lands of Lore: The Throne of Chaos*. He's also been in nine *Star Trek* titles, five *X-Men* games and *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* and some other game we've never heard of. Busy bloke.



The Godfather II 6
EA REDWOOD SHORES
Starts as a decent crime caper but alienates fans of the film. Play *Mafia II* instead.

ESSENTIAL God of War III 10
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO
A showcase. Old-fashioned arse-kicking, astonishing visuals.

RECOMMENDED God of War Collection 9
SCE SANTA MONICA STUDIO / BLUEPOINT GAMES
Age has not diminished its impact. Purchase immediately.

Golden Axe: Beast Rider 4
SECRET LEVEL
Destined for the chopping block. No co-op? Boo!

ESSENTIAL Grand Theft Auto IV 10
ROCKSTAR NORTH
The technical scope and scale of *GTAIV* dwarfs all. Remarkable.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR NORTH
PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR
PLAYERS: 1-16
"Superior to *GTAIV* in many ways with two new and more interesting single-player campaigns, expanded multiplayer options and a vast array of new weapons and vehicles. Explosive shotgun? Yes please."

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince 6
EA BRIGHT LIGHT STUDIO
Play the first 30 minutes and you've played the whole game.

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix 6
EA UK
The chore-like structure will bore most.

Heavenly Sword 9
NINJA THEORY
Slick graphics and refined combat. A bit short though.

RECOMMENDED InFamous 9
SUCKER PUNCH PRODUCTIONS
A superpowered take on the urban crime-fighting sandbox.

LEGO Batman 7
TRAVELLER'S TALES
Sound and faithful, but the formula is getting a bit old.

LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 7
TRAVELLER'S TALES
The most thorough LEGO universe yet. More exploration than combat.

RECOMMENDED LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures 9
TRAVELLER'S TALES
Happiness and wonder overcame us with this joyous adaptation.

Lost: Via Domus 6
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Some solid adventuring, but the voice acting is rubbish.

RECOMMENDED Mafia II 8
CZEC
Its attention to detail, presentation and sound is to be admired.

ESSENTIAL Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots 10
KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
Yes, it's as much a movie as it is a game, but the production values are insane. A titan amongst games. Epic.

Overlord: Raising Hell 7
4J STUDIOS / TRIUMPH STUDIOS
A bundle of fun, mixing tactics with a juvenile love of chaos.

Overlord II 8
TRIUMPH STUDIOS
Refined gameplay and more jokes but control quirks persist.

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End 6
Eurocom
Looks the part but unfortunately it doesn't feel or play the part.

Planet 51 5
PYRO STUDIOS
Like a dry cracker for dinner. Bland and boring, and no fun.

Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Worth your time but better swordplay could've really helped.

Prison Break 4
ZOOFLY
A below-average stealth game cobbled together on the cheap.

RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time 9
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Reinvigorates the genre without reinventing the wheel.

RECOMMENDED Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction 8
INSOMNIAC GAMES
A big, wild, good ol' fashioned adventure.



RED DEAD REDEMPTION 10
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR
PLAYERS: 1-16

"A sweeping epic that's among the best games we've ever played. We're not lying when we say it's better than *GTAIV* in a lot of crucial areas."

RECOMMENDED Resident Evil 5 8
CAPCOM
A grand, bloody adventure but the inventory system remains bad.

RECOMMENDED The Saboteur 8
PANDEMIC STUDIOS
Charming and packed with action. Great, unique visual style.

SAW II: Flesh & Blood 6
ZOMBIE INC.
Lacks finesse but boasts some decent puzzles.

Silent Hill Homecoming 6
DOUBLE HELIX GAMES
New combat system is good, but lacks the cerebral chills.

The Simpsons Game 8
EA REDWOOD SHORES
Short, but the cromulent visuals embiggen the experience.

Sonic the Hedgehog 4
SONIC TEAM
There are cheaper ways to get a spare Blu-ray case.

Sonic Unleashed 6
SONIC TEAM
Hey! It's the least awful Sonic game in years!

Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions 5
BEENOX
Looks great – but why have we gone back to swinging from invisible hooks in the sky?

Spider-Man: Web of Shadows 7
TREYARCH / SHABA GAMES
Swift and tidy but not exactly deep.

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed 7
LUCASARTS
Fails to use its idea to maximum effect.

Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II 6
LUCASARTS
Gets a point-and-a-bit for hour that it is long. Technically superior but still rough.

RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent 9
UBISOFT SHANGHAI
Obsessive and gripping, online and off.

Toy Story 3 7
AVALANCHE SOFTWARE
Cute, simple, and charming as hell.

ESSENTIAL Uncharted: Drake's Fortune 10
NAUGHTY DOG
Awesome plot, awesome graphics, awesome action. This owns.

ESSENTIAL Uncharted 2: Among Thieves 10
NAUGHTY DOG
This is the reason Hollywood is so worried about videogames.

Viking: Battle for Asgard 7
THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY
Slow attacks and weak visuals but it has its appeal.

RECOMMENDED Yakuza 4 8
CS1 TEAM
One for the fans, but it's very refreshing.

ADVENTURE

RECOMMENDED Heavy Rain 8
QUANTIC DREAM
Not quite a revolution but very clever and very well-crafted.

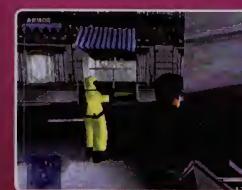
Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust 1
TEAM17 SOFTWARE
An amazing new low for this generation.

FIGHTING

Battle Fantasia 7
ARC SYSTEM WORKS
A nice curiously but, seriously, get *Super Street Fighter IV*.



THE BEST PSone CLASSICS ON PlayStation® Store



FINAL FANTASY VII
DEVELOPER: SQUARE
PLAYERS: 1

The RPG upon which all other RPGs are generally judged, *Final Fantasy VII* is a modern classic and a worthy part of every credible videogame library.

DRIVER
DEVELOPER: REFLECTIONS
INTERACTIVE PLAYERS: 1

The original *Driver* hit PlayStation like a blast of fresh air. Hectic car chases through 3D cities may old-hat now but when *Driver* debuted it was like nothing we'd seen.

CRASH BANDICOOT 3: WARPED
DEVELOPER: NAUGHTY DOG
PLAYERS: 1

The best platformer on any PlayStation. As far as old-school run and jump action in purpose-built levels goes, *this* is the zenith.

SYMPHON FILTER
DEVELOPER: EIDETIC
PLAYERS: 1

If you still think *Syphon Filter* was a *MGS* rip-off you're misled. Play it again and tell us this awesome series doesn't deserve a PS3 comeback.

MEDIEVIL
DEVELOPER: SCE STUDIO
CAMBRIDGE PLAYERS: 1

Speaking of games that deserve a PS3 comeback, where's Sir Dan? Fantasy hack 'n slash meets the supernatural, *MediEvil* still does it better than most since.



inhouse

FEATURED STUDIO OF THE MONTH

evolution
studios

Evolution Studios

LOCATION: CHESHIRE, ENGLAND FOUNDED: 1999

BEST KNOWN FOR: MOTORSTORM, WRC

Unparalleled success is the best way to sum up Evolution Studios. Part of SCE's Worldwide Studios, they're one of 15 developers that share ideas and tech openly with each other under the Sony banner. If you look at their back catalogue you'd think Evolution had been part of Sony since day zero, but it wasn't until 2007 that it was bought by the big S.

Evolution is the product of Martin Kenwright and Ian Hetherington. Kenwright sold the company he used to run, Digital Image Design – who made a bunch of games for IBM PC and Amiga, including some impressive flight simulators – and brought half a dozen staff with him. Hetherington was part of Psygnosis – the outfit responsible for a few *Formula 1* games on PSOne, and also the *Wipeout* series – and started Evolution the same year that Psygnosis officially became SCE Studio Liverpool.

Over the last 10 years Evolution has only created racing games but it's ambitious and, in a professional climate where many studios are going under, successful. Simon Barlow, assistant game director of *MotorStorm Apocalypse*, started six months after the studio was set up and says "from very early on we made these bold claims about what we do, and there's

this mantra of 'make big promises and over deliver.' That was what we did [on PS2 game *WRC: World Rally Championship*]."

Sony had bought the WRC licence, and Evolution approached them with a tech demo and won the rights to develop a rally game. "We promised Sony kilometres of terrain," continues Barlow. "Towns that you could see in the distance as you rallied down from the top of a mountain, huge vistas that were visible all the time, and they loved it. Then we thought 'well how do we build it?'"

They did so well that they released another four WRC games, one a year to 2005, before the very first *MotorStorm*. However, Barlow admits that the genre they specialise in is in decline. "Racing games haven't sold as well as they used to, and it comes down to aspirational values. Kids used to have pictures of cars on their walls in their bedrooms, and they don't anymore, [however] *GT5* sold really well and reinvigorated the market.

"We look at Naughty Dog and Santa Monica Studios and the games they produce [for inspiration]." Evolution, it seems, are matching pace with the footsteps of giants.

THE BEST PSP GAMES



**GRAND THEFT AUTO:
VICE CITY STORIES**
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR LEEDS
PLAYERS: 1-8

This is about as remarkable as gaming gets on a handheld console. A fully-fledged 3D *GTA*, just like the PS2 versions, on PSP – and it feels absolutely brilliant. Also? Phil Collins is in it. No, we're totally serious.



**MONSTER HUNTER
FREEDOM UNITE**
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
PLAYERS: 1-4

Monster Hunter is a true system seller in its native Japan and it deserves that sort of awareness here. It's an adventure game to lose your life to and will reward you in spades if you're able to put the effort in.



WIPEOUT PULSE
DEVELOPER: SCE LIVERPOOL
PLAYERS: 1-8

Beautiful and weighted just right, it's a futurist's wet dream. There's a reason *Wipeout* just works – and this is proof. Depending on which day of the week you ask us this just pips the likes of *Burnout Legends* and *Gran Turismo* for best racing game on PSP.



**METAL GEAR SOLID:
PEACE WALKER**
DEVELOPER: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
PLAYERS: 1-6

A proper, well-produced and thought-out *Metal Gear*; this is a must-have. The story's great and the action is totally addictive. We can't stress it enough: buy this game, and a PSP if you must. This is a title that no gamer should miss.



**GOD OF WAR:
GHOST OF SPARTA**
DEVELOPER: READY AT DAWN
PLAYERS: 1

Stupidly better than the already excellent *Chains of Olympus*, this still has fantastic graphics and tighter-than-hades gameplay. If you're a fan of the series, this is a crucial part of the saga you really shouldn't miss.

RECOMMENDED *BlazBlue: Continuum Shift*
ARC SYSTEM WORKS
Still wilder, wackier and noisier than anything else on PS3.

FaceBreaker
EA CANADA
Great look but very unbalanced.

The Fight: Lights Out
COLDWOOD INTERACTIVE
The Move controls don't feel as organic as we'd hoped they would. Sorry Danny Trejo.

The King of Fighters XII
SNK PLAYMORE
Grey, old and well beyond retirement. Irredeemable.

RECOMMENDED *Marvel vs. Capcom 3*
CAPCOM
Fast, fun and gorgeous. Features Hagar.

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe
MIDWAY GAMES
A fun game with mass appeal but not very technical.

RECOMMENDED *Soulcalibur IV*
NAMCO BANDAI
Phenomenal, but will let down those expecting a revolution.

RECOMMENDED *Street Fighter IV*
CAPCOM / DIMPS
A tight-fisted gut blow of wow, but you'd grab *Street Fighter IV* instead now.



SUPER STREET FIGHTER IV
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM / DIMPS
PUBLISHER: THQ PLAYERS: 1-2

"With the 'vanilla' versions vibrant look, online mode and pristine gameplay – but with a stack of new characters, all unlocked and at a bargain price – *Super Street Fighter IV* belongs in everyone's collection."

RECOMMENDED *Tekken 6*
NAMCO BANDAI
Easy to play, with the biggest roster ever. Feels a bit old, though.

TNA Impact!
MIDWAY STUDIOS - LOS ANGELES
Arcade-style biff but needs more content.

WWE Legends of WrestleMania
YUKE'S
Gets by on retro charm but feels absolutely ancient.

RECOMMENDED *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.*
UBISOFT ROMANIA
A top gun successor. More detail, better mission design.

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
YUKE'S
If the soap-drama of the WWE's your thing, welcome to nirvana.

FLYING

Apache: Air Assault
GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT
Hardcore chopper sim with impressive detail but lacks variety. Good online, though.

Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII
UBISOFT ROMANIA
A simple aerial blaster. Flawed but fun.

Blazing Angels 2: Secret Missions of WWII
UBISOFT ROMANIA
Solid, varied, but not quite the ace of aces.

Heroes Over Europe
TRANSMISSION GAMES
A little rough but not bad. *IL-2* is much better, though.



**IL-2 STURMOVIK:
BIRDS OF PREY**
DEVELOPER: GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER: AFA PLAYERS: 1-6

"Head turning visuals, astonishing attention to detail, brilliant sound effects and stacks of ratta-tat action all combine in this truly surprisingly awesome aerial combat game. To be honest it's the best flight game we've ever played."

Lair
FACTOR 5
It feels rushed and unfinished. Deeply disappointing.

Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.
UBISOFT ROMANIA
Tight and accessible but a bit sterile.

RECOMMENDED *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.*
UBISOFT ROMANIA
A top gun successor. More detail, better mission design.

MUSIC

AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack
HARMONIX
Bare-bones stuff but the music is worth it. Fully exportable.

Band Hero
NEVERSOFT
Robust but the over-zealous censorship grates a lot.

RECOMMENDED The Beatles: Rock Band
HARMONIX
Outstanding. This is a tribute like no other.

RECOMMENDED DJ Hero
FREESTYLEGAMES
Tough to write off as a gimmick.

RECOMMENDED DJ Hero 2
FREESTYLEGAMES
Some great improvements and some excellent, unique mixes.

RECOMMENDED Green Day: Rock Band
HARMONIX
Very good. Up there with *The Beatles: Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero: Metallica*.

Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock
NEVERSOFT
The last GH with a mostly decent soundtrack.

Guitar Hero World Tour
NEVERSOFT
Good, but missing crucial elements that make *Rock Band* better.

Guitar Hero 5
NEVERSOFT
Improving, but the hipster tracklist is a dud.

RECOMMENDED Guitar Hero: Metallica
NEVERSOFT
The best in the series since *Guitar Hero III*.

Guitar Hero: Greatest Hits
BEENOX
Great past GH tracks with full band support. Seriously though, why wasn't it just DLC?

Guitar Hero: Van Halen
UNDERGROUND DEVELOPMENT
Only buy this cheap: \$90 is an insult. USA GH5 buyers got it as a free bonus.

Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock
NEVERSOFT
Functional, but it just isn't evolving at the same rate as its peers.

LEGO Rock Band
HARMONIX / TRAVELLER'S TALES
Cute. Fewer tracks than we'd like though.

RECOMMENDED Rock Band
HARMONIX
The best party game ever, until the sequels.

ESSENTIAL Rock Band 2
HARMONIX
The best music game series around.

RECOMMENDED Rock Band 3
HARMONIX
Improvements to the interface abound, but it's only as good as your existing DLC library.

SingStar
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Will last as long as the PS3 with so much DLC.

PARTY

EyePet
SCE LONDON STUDIO
Harmless fun but pointless for adults.

Hail to the Chimp
WIDELOAD GAMES
Want to lose friends? Play this with them.

Kung Fu Rider
JAPAN STUDIO
Waggle-based bullshit. A terrible example of a Move game.

Scene It? Bright Lights! Big Screen!
A2M
Vanilla compared to the past Xbox versions.

The Shoot
COHORT STUDIOS
A good Move rail shooter. Cool presentation.

RECOMMENDED Sports Champions
ZINDAGI GAMES
Despite a few quirks this is the must-have Move title.

7 Start the Party!
SUPERMASSIVE GAMES
Great to keep the rugrats amused for a while.

PUZZLE/PLATFORMER

RECOMMENDED Katamari Forever
NAMCO BANDAI
Joyfulness, digitally realised. Infectious.

RECOMMENDED LittleBigPlanet 2
MEDIA MOLECULE
Like the original it's innovative and never-ending. Improves upon an amazing product.

RECOMMENDED The Sly Collection
SUCKER PUNCH
A surprisingly fun and fresh bunch of gems.

RACING

Blur
BIZARRE CREATIONS
A race to power-ups rather than a racer with power-ups.

RECOMMENDED Burnout Paradise
CRITERION GAMES
Stunning and sharp but we miss the dedicated Crash Mode.

RECOMMENDED Colin McRae: DiRT
CODEMASTERS
Plenty of real rally action, unlike its sequel.

Colin McRae: DiRT 2
CODEMASTERS
Flashy and drives fine but it's style over substance here.



GRAN TURISMO 5
DEVELOPER: POLYPHONY DIGITAL
PUBLISHER: SCE PLAYERS: 1-16

"GT5 feels familiar, and is still an RPG masquerading as a racing game. It looks stunning with class-leading lighting effects and exceptionally modelled premium cars, and with a G27 wheel it feels incredible. We just wish that there were some more recent cars."

Fuel
ASOBOSTUDIOS
Huge, but bugged, boring and undercooked.

Full Auto 2: Battlelines
PSEUDO INTERACTIVE
Fun but shallow. You'd take *Split/Second* instead these days.

RECOMMENDED F1 2010
CODEMASTERS
A white-knuckle racer and an authentic title.

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights
JUICE GAMES
Stout mechanics, glossy options. Not too deep though.

Midnight Club: Los Angeles
ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
Visually weak at times. Great customisation and seamless racing.

RECOMMENDED ModNation Racers
UNITED FRONT GAMES
An incredible package. Creating is even more fun than racing.

MotoGP 09/10
MONUMENTAL GAMES
Simulation freaks will want to veer well away.

RECOMMENDED MotorStorm
EVOLUTION STUDIOS
Fast, hard and dirty. Things have come on a bit since 2007 though.

Title rights



There has been 19 *Need for Speed* titles developed since the franchise started in 1994. It's appeared on 17 different formats (from PC, PSone, ancient and dead-in-the-water 3DO to PSP, PS3 and beyond) and has also had eight different developers. Eden Games' *V-Rally* was known as *Need for Speed V-Rally* in the States. Weird.

RPG/ACTION RPG

Alpha Protocol
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
Great concept, poor execution. Also? Worst male lead ever.

Cross Edge
COMPILE HEART
Every benchmark of excellence has been missed. Offensive.

DC Universe Online
SONY ONLINE
Pretty but shallow, and expensive subs too.

RECOMMENDED Dragon Age: Origins
BIOWARE
As long as it is enthralling. Essential for patient fantasy freaks.

ESSENTIAL The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion
BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS
Simply put: awesome.



FALLOUT 3

DEVELOPER: BETHESDA PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS PLAYERS: 1
"Taking the solid base of *Oblivion* and placing it into a post-apocalyptic wasteland always sounded like a great idea and *Fallout 3* proves that concept brilliantly."

RECOMMENDED Fallout: New Vegas
OBSIDIAN ENTERTAINMENT
A great ride but you've been on it before.

RECOMMENDED Final Fantasy XIII
SQUARE ENIX
Spellbinding graphics and 50+ hours of action.

Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2
VICARIOUS VISIONS
A compelling romp but the button-mashing play needs updating.

ESSENTIAL Mass Effect 2
BIOWARE
Astonishingly rich combat-driven sci-fi. An action RPG without peer.

Nier
CAVIA UNRELEASED
Decent enough, but there are richer experiences elsewhere.

Resonance of Fate
TRI-ACE
Deep, but also wordy, clunky and ugly.

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel
ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT
Gigantic, but feels very slapped together.

Valkyria Chronicles
SEGA WOW
Strategy and RPG heads alike should not miss this game.

SHOOTER

RECOMMENDED Aliens vs. Predator 9
REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
One of the best movie-inspired titles ever. Beyond brutal.

RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company 8
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Destructible environments and humour. Together at last.

RECOMMENDED Battlefield: Bad Company 2 8
DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A top-tier shooter but the single-player mischief is M.I.A.

RECOMMENDED BioShock 8
IRRATIONAL GAMES / 2K MARIN
14 months too late, but this is grown-up gaming at its best.

RECOMMENDED BioShock 2 9
2K MARIN / DIGITAL EXTREMES / 2K AUSTRALIA
Doesn't match the original's plot.

BlackSite: Area 51 5
MIDWAY STUDIOS AUSTIN
A pedestrian shooter that needed more time in the lab.



BORDERLANDS

DEVELOPER: GEARBOX SOFTWARE

PUBLISHER: 2K PLAYERS: 1-4

"Borderlands starts out great and only gets better. It takes the best elements from RPGs and fuses them to a superb shooter. The result is quite simply the most rewarding co-op to date. The fact it's being supported by so much extra DLC, even this long after release, means it's great value for money too."

RECOMMENDED Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway 8
GEARBOX SOFTWARE
The most authentic WWII shooter ever made.

Call of Duty 3 7
TREYARCH
Solid but surprisingly unspectacular.

ESSENTIAL Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare 10
INFINITY WARD
Relentlessly exciting. You'd have to be mental to miss this.



MODERN WARFARE 2

DEVELOPER: INFINITY WARD

PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION PLAYERS: 1-18

"It's almost like three games in one, stuffed with moments that will leave you shocked and breathless with excitement. Supremely crafted, *Modern Warfare 2* is, with its older brother, a high-watermark for this generation of shooters."

RECOMMENDED Call of Duty: Black Ops 9
TREYARCH
A generous package with great solo and online play. The presentation's excellent too.

ESSENTIAL Call of Duty: World at War 10
TREYARCH
A class act. War at its worst (and best). Proof you can make a great WWII game set (partially) in the Pacific. Plus, Nazi Zombies.

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood 7
TECHLAND
A cinematic and action-packed Western shooter.

RECOMMENDED The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena 8
STARBREEZE STUDIOS / TIGON STUDIOS
Moody and fresh. A must play. You don't need to know the movies to enjoy it either.

Condemned 2: Bloodshot 9
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
Gripping stuff. We were blown away. Shame the original isn't on PS3.

RECOMMENDED The Darkness 9
STARBREEZE STUDIOS
Stunning, original and gory as hell. Hopefully the sequel makes it here because this rocks.

Casualty of war

The ex-*Call of Duty* game director Keith Arem has spoken to *gamesindustry.biz* about the infamous 'No Russian' level in *Modern Warfare 2*, and said that Infinity Ward were aware of how controversial it may be. Arem said he found the level hard to play. Ironically, he's now working with THQ on the new *Saints Row* game.

F.E.A.R.

MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS / DAY 1 STUDIOS
A chilling ride, but the graphics could've been sharper.

F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin 7
MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS
An above-average shooter suffering from a lack of imagination.

RECOMMENDED Far Cry 2 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
A technical open-world bell-ringer but the travel time will grate.

Haze 6
FREE RADICAL DESIGN
Patchy visuals, tragic level design and dismal AI.

RECOMMENDED Homefront 8
KAOS STUDIOS
Polished but blink-and-you'll-miss-it single player. A fine alternative to CoD multi, though.

ESSENTIAL Killzone 2 10
GUERRILLA GAMES
Lives up to the hype. Amazing graphics, hectic action.

RECOMMENDED Killzone 3 9
GUERRILLA GAMES
Epic firefights and an engrossing storyline. It's also a winner with Move.

Legendary 4
SPARK UNLIMITED
A rushed mess. Terrible.

RECOMMENDED MAG 9
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
Shooter junkies take heed: this is where it's at for online combat.

RECOMMENDED Medal of Honor 8
DANGER CLOSE / DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
Not sexy but it's a gritty, realistic shooter with great atmosphere.

Medal of Honor: Airborne 6
EA LOS ANGELES
Short and lacks innovation. Too many problems.

MindJack 4
FEELPLUS
An ill-planned concept with awful execution. Buggy and boring, too.

RECOMMENDED

Mirror's Edge 8
EA DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
A true original that makes some grand leaps in design.

Operation Flashpoint: Dragon Rising 8
CODEMASTERS
Authentic but niche. Very unforgiving.

RECOMMENDED The Orange Box 9
EA UK / VALVE CORPORATION
Get it for *Portal*, keep it for *Half-Life 2*.

Quantum of Solace 7
TREYARCH
Has too many faults to be compelling.

RECOMMENDED Resistance: Fall of Man 10
INSOMNIAC GAMES
A fantastic launch title with sweet weapons.

RECOMMENDED Resistance 2 9
INSOMNIAC GAMES
Fast, furious and stuffed with action.

Rogue Warrior 3
ZOMBIE STUDIOS / REBELLION DEVELOPMENTS
A fiasco. We tried to like it but it's too short and too terrible.

Singularity 7
RAVEN SOFTWARE
Had potential but wasn't quite worth the wait.

TimeShift 6
SABER INTERACTIVE
A solid attempt that doesn't quite reach 88 miles per hour.

RECOMMENDED Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 8
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Slick, good-looking and utterly engaging.

Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2 7
UBISOFT MONTREAL
Not as good or as cool as the first one.

Turning Point: Fall of Liberty 4
SPARK UNLIMITED
Scrappy throughout. Great concept, bogus execution.

Unreal Tournament 3 8
EPIC GAMES
Fast, twitchy online multiplayer shooting. No splitscreen though.

SPORTS

2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa 7
EA CANADA
Blissful, *FIFA 10* football with a World Cup facelift. A bit pricey.

Ashes Cricket 2009 6
TRANSMISSION GAMES
Disappointing, but stick through the ugly for some multiplayer beauty.

Backbreaker 7
NATURALMOTION
Great tech. Worth a look to see euphoria at work in a sports game.



THE BEST PSN GAMES ON PlayStation Store



BRAID
DEVELOPER: HOTHEAD
PLAYERS: 1

A charming platformer that incorporates one of last decade's most used mechanics – time manipulation – whilst wrapped up in gorgeous graphics. Incredibly addictive and charming, it's made even better when you discover it was all made by one man.



PIXELJUNK SHOOTER
DEVELOPER: Q-GAMES
PLAYERS: 1-2

Take control of a tiny ship and navigate your way through various caverns, rescuing any survivors along the way. Of course, there's interesting gameplay mechanics thrown into the mix, such as fluid water and lava dynamics that need to be used to solve puzzles.



FLIGHT CONTROL HD
DEVELOPER: FIREMINT
PLAYERS: 1-4

Possibly the most addictive and accessible PSN title available. The premise is simply to guide the aircraft on-screen to their respective runways. That's it – but you'll be totally hooked. One of the best games to play with PlayStation Move too.



PAC-MAN CE DX
DEVELOPER: NAMCO BANDAI PARTNERS
PLAYERS: 1

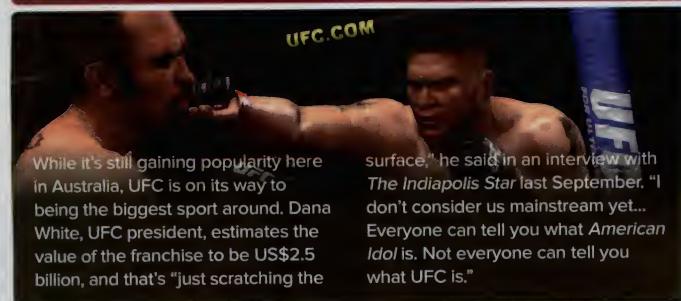
More than an update, this is a revolution. The 'CE' stands for 'Championship Edition', and is a mash of different maps and modes revolving around guiding Pacifiers through the dots and waiting ghosts. This is begging to be your new addiction.



PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES
DEVELOPER: POPCAP GAMES
PLAYERS: 1-2

The smash hit on PC lands on PSN, and this tower defense title plays beautifully with a controller. You have a variety of plants to defend your end of the lawn while the undead shuffle and eat their way across. Extremely addictive and actually loaded with braaains.

A fistful of dollars



While it's still gaining popularity here in Australia, UFC is on its way to being the biggest sport around. Dana White, UFC president, estimates the value of the franchise to be US\$2.5 billion, and that's "just scratching the

surface," he said in an interview with *The Indianapolis Star* last September. "I don't consider us mainstream yet... Everyone can tell you what *American Idol* is. Not everyone can tell you what UFC is."

Beijing 2008

EUROCOM

Not the worst of its type but far from a game to buy and keep.

EA Sports MMA

EA SPORTS

Great controls but struggles to be convincing.



FIFA 11

DEVELOPER: EA CANADA

PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-22

"While the hundreds of matches ahead may eventually bring this titan back to Earth with another wish-list of changes for *FIFA 12*, at the moment *FIFA 11* remains a bafflingly brilliant update. If you've skipped the last few *FIFA* updates boost the score by one. Seriously, it's that good. Essential."

RECOMMENDED Fight Night Round 4

EA CANADA

Runs like a dream. Technical and strategic, plus it looks absolutely brilliant.

International Cricket 2010

TRICKSTAR GAMES

Not the most comprehensive cricket game but certainly the best when you're on the pitch.

John Daly's ProStroke Golf

GUSTO GAMES

Those looking for a high production value golf game should give this the shaft.

RECOMMENDED NBA 2K11

VISUAL CONCEPTS / KUSH GAMES

Hard court high priest Michael Jordan stars in perhaps the best basketball game ever.

NBA Jam

EA CANADA

A faithful and fun update to the '90s classic.

Pro Evolution Soccer 2011

KONAMI

Good for a goal fix, still second best overall. Get *FIFA 11*.

Rugby League Live

BIG ANT

Not as complete a game as the last one on PS2 and the whack team ratings frustrate.

Shaun White Skateboarding

UBISOFT MONTREAL

Kudos for the quirky touches but the skating itself is pretty bland.

Shaun White Snowboarding

UBISOFT MONTREAL

Lacks the fine touch of realism or the excitement of lunacy.

RECOMMENDED Skate

EA BLACK BOX

A well-balanced masterpiece and true *Tony Hawk* killer. Trumped by its sequels.



SKATE 2

DEVELOPER: BLACK BOX

PUBLISHER: EA PLAYERS: 1-8

"*Skate 2* is one of the greatest sports games ever conceived. The controls are flawless, the city is dense and packed with natural lines and the balance is sublime."

RECOMMENDED Skate 3

EA BLACK BOX

Better in many ways, although the city isn't as cool as *Skate 2*.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09

EA TIBURON

Still the only golf game worth owning.

Tony Hawk's Project 8

NEVERSOFT

No real reason to revisit this post-*Skate* at all.

Tony Hawk's Proving Ground

NEVERSOFT

Bloated and inconsistent. Pass.

Tony Hawk's RIDE

ROBOMODO

Pure frustration made plastic.

Top Spin 3

PAM DEVELOPMENT

Realistic tennis with a steep learning curve. Rewarding, but needs time to master.

RECOMMENDED UFC Undisputed 2010

YUKE'S

The new undisputed baron of sports fighting.

Vancouver 2010

EUROCOM

A handful of events that last one afternoon.

RECOMMENDED Virtua Tennis 2009

SUMO DIGITAL

The top seed of tennis made even better. Great four player fun.

STRATEGY

RECOMMENDED Civilization Revolution

FIRAXIS GAMES

Great fun and shockingly addictive.

RECOMMENDED R.U.S.E.

EUGEN SYSTEMS

Niche but supremely well-crafted strategy. Better with Move, too.

The Sims 3

THE SIMS STUDIO

Waiting to pounce on the right type of gamer.

Stormrise

THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY

A cack-handed, future war mess.

Tom Clancy's EndWar

UBISOFT SHANGHAI

Far from a finished product. Works, but it's hardly an essential purchase.

infamous

REVISITING PLAYSTATION CLASSICS

TENCHU

STEALTH ASSASSINS

PlayStation

1998: TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS

CONSOLE: PLAYSTATION GENRE: STEALTH DEVELOPER: ACQUIRE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: JAPAN CURRENT APPROXIMATE PRICE: \$10



You've got to respect any game bearing a title that literally translates into heaven death penalty. In the late '90s stealth games were just becoming the next big thing; you simply couldn't turn around without bumping into a detection meter or a box to hide in. It made sense then that the sneakiest throat-slitters in the business got some representation.

Tenchu took place in feudal Japan, and introduced a pair of curiously English-speaking ninja with American accents: Rikimaru and Ayame. This dynamic death-dealing duo serve the heroic Lord Gohda, and work for him as his spies to root out corruption, gather intelligence in his province and rescue his daughter for the umpteenth time in a week. To make the menial murder more interesting, developer Acquire flavoured this adventure with the exotic taste of Japanese mythology. You're soon uncovering cults lead by the evil demonic sorcerer Lord Mei-Oh and strongarmed by his demon warrior Onikage.

In a game design decision not often seen in modern times, Acquire let you undertake each and every mission with one of two protagonists. Rikimaru was a silent, strict bad-arse armed who traded speed for strength and the ability to take more sword hits before death (if that is in fact an 'ability'). Conversely, Ayame had a tongue sharper than her twin wakizashi and had access to a wider range of combos.

Beyond those important differences, each ninja shared the same basic abilities and access

to rocking ninja items. The most useful and frequently used of these was a grappling hook that would've made Batman jealous and throwing knives that could turn a boss fight in your favour. You also had caltrops, mines, grenades and smoke bombs, but it's worth noting that the really cool stuff was earned by achieving Grandmaster rank on the levels. Some of our personal favourites included poisoned rice balls to mess with the guards bowels, a decoy whistle to fool people into thinking you're just a cat and the ability to shape-shift into a harmless civilian.

In its time *Tenchu: Stealth Assassins* was one hell of a good game. Unfortunately, as we look back over the mists of time a few things stand out as annoying. All of the levels take place at night to compensate for the technical limitations of the PlayStation and this means you can see a good five metres in front of you. Also, this game arrived before DualShocks were commonplace and its lack of analogue input, along with a lack of combat lock-on, that makes a swordfight much harder than it needs to be.

If you're going to replay this, we'd recommend tracking down the DualShock-supported Japanese version which also featured 100 extra levels. Interestingly, these levels were the best user-generated offerings from a mission creator that was present in the Japanese version (but cut out of our piddly little European version). Beyond that option, this may control like Rikety-maru on a D-pad but it still offers killer nostalgia nonetheless.

SHINY HAPPY PEOPLE

Tenchu used motion capture where actor/martial artist Sho Kosugi was hired to do the game's combat moves. True children of the '80s will remember Kosugi from a slew of sweet ninja flicks like *Enter the Ninja*, *Revenge of the Ninja* and *Pray for Death*. If you want to see him without a balaclava on, he's the Japanese assassin in 1989's *Blind Fury*.

Next month

EXCLUSIVE ▶

Tomb Raider

Behind-the-scenes with developer Crystal Dynamics and its bold reboot of a true PlayStation icon, **ONLY** in next month's issue!

PLUS

Duke Nukem Forever
AFL Live • Portal 2 • L.A. Noire
SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALS
Shadows of the Damned
Sniper: Ghost Warrior
and more!

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The **only** PS3 mag with 100% Australian content!

PlayStation
Official Magazine - Australia

Disclaimer: OPS will do everything to deliver this content next month but we can't be held at fault if things go awry or scheduled games slip and miss our deadline!

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DAY 1 STUDIOS

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GAMES

Check the Classification

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crude humour and
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